

ISLAM AND SPORT



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

Foreword 5

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION 6

CHAPTER 2

BENEFITS AND HARMS OF SPORT ... 11

Harms of Modern Sport 11

Benefits of Modern Sport 45

Perceived benefits 48

Evaluation of Benefits and Harms 49

Conclusion 51

CHAPTER 3

THREE MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS .. 55

The Olympics Games 55

Soccer 66

Cricket 74

CHAPTER 4

ISLAM AND SPORT 87

The Holy Qur`ân and Sport 87

'Sport' in the Hadith 90

Relaxing the Mind and Body 94

Prohibited Sports 97

PAGE

CHAPTER 5

THE MUSLIM AND 'MODERN SPORT' . . .	99
Participation in 'Modern Sport' . . .	99
Watching or Spectating 'Modern Sport'	102
Indoor Games	104
Sports as an Epidemic	109
Why this epidemic?	112
Solutions	113
Alternatives	115

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY	118
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Foreword

All praise is due to Allāh (*'Azza wa jall*), the Creator of the universe and may His peace and blessings be upon the best of creation, Hazrat Muhammad (*Sallallāhu alaihi wasallam*).

Islam is a pristine and pure religion, offering guidelines for every aspect of human existence. With this in mind, together with the fact that sport has reached astronomical proportions in society, it was deemed necessary to explore the subject of sports and relaxation from an Islamic perspective. With special reference to the Muslim community, which has also been enveloped by the glamour and fascination of the sporting world, this publication will Insha-Allāh serve as a guideline on the subject.

The author makes a fervent Dua unto Allāh (*'Azza wa jall*) to accept this humble publication, to forgive any shortcomings and to make it a means of salvation for himself, his parents, family, teachers and his near and dear ones. May He also reward all those who assisted in whichever way in making this publication possible. *Āmin.*

Afzal Ismail
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, man has invented various forms of entertainment in order to overcome the stresses and strains associated with modern day living. Undoubtedly, sport has become one of the greatest entertainments of modern day society, if not the greatest. In fact, sport has even extended the boundaries of entertainment and has become a serious industry in itself.

What is sport?

The term 'sport' can be defined and interpreted in various ways, since sport and games mean different things to different people. Some cultures may regard fishing as a sport while others consider it as a means of earning a living. This means that any single definition of sport will be arbitrary because of variations amongst different cultures, nationalities, religions, etc.

Some definitions of sport are:

- 1) That which makes mirth, pastime, amusement.
- 2) Organised athletic activities played individually or in teams.
- 3) Recreational or competitive activities that involve some amount of physical strength or skill.¹

How did modern sport originate?

Modern sport, with its recreational and economic variants, differs markedly from the sports and games of ancient times. It has been suggested that many of the original forms of sports were a means of training for warfare and combat. Other sports were motivated by religious and political factors. The ancient Olympic Games had

strong religious connotations and were held to honour the pagan gods.

Western sources maintain that these original forms of sports, like today's modern sports, had a recreational element attached to them. However, it is an undeniable fact that the recreational status of modern sport has increased enormously when compared with ancient times.

Sports, as we know them today, began to emerge in the 18th and 19th centuries. Sports of ancient times were revived or modified and new ones were invented. Organizations were set up to regulate and standardize rules for the various types of sports.

Many sports which originated and were standardized in England, the United States and Europe spread throughout the world. This increase in popularity and fame of these sports amongst people of foreign lands can be attributed to imperialism and lately, the media, amongst other factors.

During the age of imperialism, when Africa and Asia were colonised, the English, Americans and Europeans suppressed the traditional indigenous sports and introduced their own.² This is the reason why cricket is so popular in the Indo-Pak sub-continent and why soccer is a craze in Africa.

The development and growth of modern sports has been due to the effect of the modern mass media.³ Television has been largely responsible for transporting sports to all parts of the globe. Specialised sports magazines, journals, newspaper reports, radio broadcasts, television and lately the internet, have all contributed in some way in taking sport to the masses.

Why do people participate in sport?

A brief study into the reasons why people participate in sport in today's times, is important because it will help to explain the permissibility of modern sport from an Islamic perspective.

People choose to participate in sport due to intrinsic or extrinsic motives. Intrinsic motives include a search for pleasure, fun, physical fitness, personal achievement and self-confidence. Extrinsic motives include material rewards, social status and social approval from adults and peers.⁴

The unique distinctive character of each individual will ultimately determine the reason for participation in sport. For some, intrinsic factors will dominate while in others intrinsic and extrinsic motives may go hand in hand. Also, these motivating factors may vary depending on other factors such as age, culture, nationality and religion.

In the majority of cases, the first acquaintance with sport comes in childhood. Research suggests that among the most important factors which cause children to engage in sports are due to adult influences. This particularly applies to children under the age of ten. However, even during the teenage years, the adult influence is substantial.

Factors which cause children to choose a certain sport may be due to the following reasons:

1. Encouragement from parents or an influential adult.
2. Admiration for an adult who is an outstanding sports performer (eg. a coach, teacher or star performer).
3. By seeing a sport performed at a stadium or on television.

4. The attraction of visible rewards, such as trophies, medals, prizes, money, etc.
5. Physical education or sports training at school level which is a compulsory element of the school curriculum.
6. The availability of sports facilities and equipment.⁵

The fact that adults play an important role in determining the extent of children's involvement in sport, and the significance of this, will be analyzed from an Islamic perspective at a later stage.

The critical reader, may at this point quite rightly point out that the above reasons for participation in sport are from an un-Islamic perspective. However, the fact is that many Muslims today have unfortunately been overwhelmed by un-Islamic principles and have implemented these erroneous practices into their daily lives. Hence, while the above reasons for participation in sport may not be applicable to all Muslims, these could give us some idea of why some Muslims participate in sport. In addition, the above motives for participation will certainly apply to those Muslims who are not guided by Islamic principles, especially with regard to the Islamic stance on sport.

Conclusion

Sport is a complex subject. Sport in the modern world is vastly different from ancient times. The origins of modern sport indicate that sport has evolved and changed through the ages. The motivational factors for participation in sport have also changed through the years. Sport as a product of society has been shaped in order to meet the changes of a turbulent world. At present sport seems to be pursued mainly for entertainment and pleasure. Whether this will change or not, only time will tell.

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CHAPTER 2

BENEFITS AND HARMS OF SPORT

This chapter discusses the positive and negative aspects of modern sport. These benefits and harms of sport have been explored from different angles. It is important to understand that some of the benefits from a Western perspective may not be benefits from an Islamic perspective. In other words, some perceived benefits may actually be detrimental to the individual and society when viewed Islamically.

Harms of Modern Sport

To a participant or athlete, the aim of sport is to score a goal, to win a medal, to earn money, to gain prestige and glory. To a fan, sport may bring fun, pleasure and excitement. But beneath this fantasy world, sport raises important ethical and moral questions. The sporting world is affected by issues and concerns which television is not allowed to show and which newspapers do not tell.

What follows is a description of some of the harms and underlying issues affecting modern sport. These complexities have been classified in terms of: (a) participation, (b) viewing and spectating and (c) general.

a. Harms of Participation

1. Drugs and Doping

The quest for fame and glory may drive the athlete to cheat and use illegal tactics. For example, the abuse of drugs in order to

enhance performance. However, studies have also shown that athletes may use drugs, alcohol and other substances to cope with stress.¹ The issue of drugs in sport became a major controversy during the 1988 Seoul Olympics when the sprinter Ben Johnson was caught using a banned substance. The use of an androgenic anabolic steroid enhanced his performance to such a degree that his time of 9.79 seconds for the 100 metres sprint was the fastest race ever recorded in human history. During a period of 20 years (1972 - 1992) a total of 45 athletes were tested positive for banned substances during Olympic performances.

It is obvious that athletes who are prepared to use drugs to maximize performance, work hand - in - hand with experienced medical personnel. These so called "professionals" are prepared to sacrifice ethics for materialistic gain. It is also alleged that many national and international federations have ignored prominent drug users, have protected their stars from exposure and have even supplied steroids to athletes.² It has also been established that these drugs are sold to athletes through sophisticated drug rings and underground networks which smuggle drugs from various countries.

The number of athletes who are exposed and banned for using drugs constitute only a small percentage of the total number of athletes who use drugs. The public has been led to assume that if 5 athletes were tested positive during a function, this meant that the rest were not using drugs. This assumption is completely false. It only means that the careless and ill-advised get caught,³ that athletes are more sophisticated than doping control programmes⁴ and that cover up operations by sports officials are being used to protect their own interests.

The use of drugs in sport goes further than just simple ingestion of

steroids. Experts believe that masking or blocking agents are used by athletes to neutralize any banned substance that has been ingested. Another method used by female athletes to cover up is the infusion of drug - free urine (donated by friends) into the bladder.⁵ This means that testing procedures could easily prove ineffective in detecting the use of a banned substance. It is also interesting to note how many athletes suffer from asthma (after being accused of illicit drug taking) and how many claim sabotage by unnamed rivals. This adds a further dilemma. Not only are athletes prepared to cheat in order to win, but they are prepared to lie in order to cover up.

It is also a fact that many of these performance-enhancing drugs may cause severe side effects. For example, anabolic steroids may cause liver cancer. This means that the quest for winning may force the athlete to sacrifice good health and to even perhaps decrease lifespan.

From an Islamic perspective, the use of drugs in sport raises three major issues. Firstly, dishonesty in the form of cheating and covering up. It is clear that deception and dishonesty is prevalent amongst athletes and administrators alike. A Muslim is taught from a young age to be always truthful, honest and fair. Abdullah-b-Masud reported that the Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) said: "You shall speak the truth, because truth leads to piety and piety leads to paradise. Beware of falsehood because falsehood leads to transgression and transgression leads to the fire."^a

Secondly, the use of drugs is in itself questionable. The use of any substance which intoxicates has been forbidden by both the Qur'ân

^a Agreed by Bukhari and Muslim

and Sunnah. Allāh (*'Azza wa jall*) says in the Holy Qur'ān: "O you who believe! Khamr (alcohol and intoxicating drugs) and gambling and idolatrous practices and foretelling the future are but a hateful evil of Satan's doing; shun it, therefore, so that you may be graced with everlasting good." The Holy Prophet (*Sallallāhu alaihi wasallam*) has also said: "Every drink that causes intoxication is forbidden." Therefore, the use of any drug or substance either used to control stress or to enhance performance and which has the potential for intoxication has been forbidden.

Thirdly, the fact that some of the performance-enhancing drugs can physically harm the body due to their adverse effects, casts yet a further doubt. Islam prohibits one from intentionally damaging one's own body for the sake of recreation. Allāh (*'Azza wa jall*) says in the Holy Qur'ān: "And do not be cast into ruin by your own hands..."^a The Holy Qur'ān also declares: "Nor kill (or destroy) yourselves..."^b The Holy Prophet (*Sallallāhu alaihi wasallam*) has said: "Do not harm yourself or others."^c Hence, based on the above three reasons, the use of drugs in sport is prohibited.

2. Shameful Dress

The code of dress for many modern sports can be classified in terms of Islamic Shariah as totally obscene and shameful. Participants in sports like swimming and athletics are seen wearing

^a Al Qur'ān Surah 2 Verse 195.

^b Al Qur'ān Surah 4 Verse 29.

^c Reported by Ahmad and Ibn Majah

extremely revealing outfits. Exposure of the human body in this form is not only sinful for the athlete but allows millions of people to commit Zina of the eyes as well.

Islam strongly forbids exposure of the male and female body in this form. The Holy Prophet (*Sallallāhu alaihi wasallam*) has said:

"For every religion of the world there is a distinctive morality, and the distinctive morality for Islam is modesty." (Ibn Majah)

The exposure of the area between the navel and the knees in males is forbidden by Islam. Hazrat Ali (Radiallāhu 'anhu) reported that the Prophet (*Sallallāhu alaihi wasallam*) said: "O Ali! Do not keep your thigh exposed, and do not look at the thigh of any living man or dead man."^a

The exposure of the female body has also been prohibited to an even greater extent than in males. Allāh (*'Azza wa jall*) says in the Holy Qur'ān: "O Nabi! Say to your wives, your daughters and to the women of the Mu'mineen that they draw over them their Jilbābs (outer cloaks or burqahs). That (i.e. covering themselves with jilbābs) is the least (minimum requirement which they should adopt) so that they be recognized and not be molested."^b

Another component of sportswear is the advertising of commodities which are Harām (eg. alcohol). A youngster who idolises a sports - star who consistently wears clothing which advertises alcohol may easily be convinced that the consumption

^a Mishkāt - Abu Dawood, Ibn Majah.

^b Al Qur'ān Surah Ahzāb, Āyat 59.

of alcohol is permissible.

This menace of shameful dressing is not only a characteristic of sport but of life in general. Society, as a result of Western influence, has plummeted into an abyss of self-destruction. The loss of honour, modesty and self-respect are totally ignored and that which was once shameful is now seen as desirable.

Islam has given very definite guidelines as regards the preservation of modesty and dignity. The Holy Prophet (*Sallallāhu alaihi wasallam*) has said: "Modesty and chastity are parts of the faith." The Holy Qur'ān says: "Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty..... And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments"^a Hence Muslims should never dress like those who have no knowledge of the principles of humility, piety and modesty.

3. Effects on Children

Sporting events for children organised by adults in which there is a predominant emphasis on victory at any price can be a serious problem. Experts warn that a culture where traditional morals, values and even essential motor skills are ignored in favour of a 'win at all cost' strategy, can lead to difficulties.

Some psychologists are of the opinion that contact sports may lead to antisocial behaviour. Children who are involved in high-contact sports may have less well-developed moral reasoning. They may further show greater tendencies towards aggression.⁶

^a Al Qur'ān Sura Nur Verse 30-31.

Nowadays, children as young as 4 and 5 years of age are exposed to competitive sport. Pushing children into sports at an early age can restrict them from reaching their full potential.⁷ Studies have also shown that highly competitive sports are potentially harmful to both physiological and psychological growth and development.⁸

Another serious problem with children is specialization in sport at a young age. The fact that skills are best learnt by the very young has led to the development of specialist sports schools and institutes where young potential competitors are selected, trained and groomed. Even technology has been utilised in some countries and computers continually monitor the progress of a young competitor so as to choose the most talented.⁹ This system leads to a number of problems. Firstly, there is isolation of the child from normal society. Secondly, failure due to the harsh selection process may cause emotional difficulties. Thirdly, over-specialization is dangerous for body development¹⁰ and may also cause emotional and psychological problems.

It is through lack of insight that parents of today openly encourage their children to participate in sport while little or no such enthusiasm exists for Islamic activities (eg. performing Salāh, reading Qur'ān, etc). It is even more of a tragedy, when parents openly imitate and idolize sports stars or give preference to sport at the expense of Salāh. What kind of example is being set for the future flag bearers of Islam - our children? The Holy Prophet (*Sallallāhu alaihi wasallam*) has said: "Parents are the shepherds of their children and every shepherd will be held responsible for their children's straying."

The Holy Qur'ān says: "O you who believe! Save yourselves and

your families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones..."^a

4. Jealousy, Hatred and Pride

The 'Olympic Creed' which states that "the important thing is not to win but to take part", is more of an ideal than a reality. Nowadays, the important thing is the number of records broken and the number of medals won. The aim of the athlete is to be the greatest, the best and to win gold at all cost. Victory promises fame, financial rewards, sponsorship and glory. The rapid increase in salaries and prize money seems to be largely responsible for the loss of morals and values. The desire to win may drive the athlete to use illegal tactics, to cheat. In addition, the 'Olympic Symbol' which is meant to represent the sporting friendship of all people is ignored because jealousy, hatred and envy prevail. Pride and arrogance seem to go hand in hand with victory.

We as Muslims are taught never to sacrifice our Islamic morals and values least of all in the pursuit of name, fame and worldly pleasure. The Holy Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) has warned about jealousy saying: "Save yourselves from jealousy for verily jealousy devours good deeds just as fire devours wood."^b The Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) has further warned us regarding the evils of pride and arrogance.

5. Aggression

Aggression involves the intentional infliction of some type of harm

a Al Qur'an Surah 66 Verse 6.

b Sunan Abi Dawood.

upon others. The causes of aggression include frustration, direct provocation and heightened arousal.¹¹ Studies have shown that arousal stemming from participation in competitive games can facilitate aggression.¹² Participation at elite level and even recreational sport to a degree display elements of frustration and provocation.

Competition can be a contributory factor towards aggression especially when a reward is at stake. It has been shown that aggression increases as the prize increases.¹³

Sport often breeds hatred, malice and hostility. While sporting competitions promote group solidarity, they reinforce hostility towards the other group.¹⁴

6. Anxiety and Stress

Anxiety is an inherent aspect of sports competition. Anxiety can be defined as a performer's interpretation of the competitive environment as potentially dangerous or threatening to his or her success or self-esteem.¹⁵ In an attempt to maximise performance or to obtain a competitive edge, elite athletes often show signs of chronic fatigue, injury, illness and stress. It has been proven that athletes across all age groups and skill levels report experiencing some manifestations of anxiety (cognitive and somatic) before, during and after competition.¹⁶ Cognitive anxiety consists of unpleasant feelings. Somatic anxiety includes symptoms such as stomach upsets, increased heart rate and sweating.¹⁷

The factors responsible for creating pressure within the athlete can be classified as internal and external.

Internal factors: Producing a personal best, a 'win at all costs' philosophy, 'psyching - up' for an event, regular or intense training,

External factors: Expectations from others (eg. coaches, team mates, parents, fans), financial and time pressures, the media.

7. Technology

Technology has affected modern sport to a significant extent. Athletes have been transformed into machines or robots, programmed and manipulated by scientists, chemists, biologists and computer specialists. In order to give an idea of the contribution of modern technology towards sport within the last 30 years, the following examples are cited:

1. Information regarding the physiology, strength, past performances, eating habits, mental attitudes, training schedules, etc. is fed into a computer to assist athletes, coaches and selectors to help train and choose the best athletes available.
2. Computerized biochemical analysis allow an athlete's action to be filmed in slow motion. The movements of his joint centres are converted into mathematical relationships which are then assessed by computer. This technique allows an athlete to determine whether any muscles in any part of his body are working to enhance or diminish a particular action (eg. running).
3. The removal of two litres of a person's blood over a period of a week and then reinfusing it at a later stage may enhance a person's endurance by up to 5%.¹⁸
4. The stress and tension of archers and shooters can be electronically measured and their anxiety can hence be decreased through biofeedback.
5. Advances in technology in the future will allow athletes to train

by means of virtual reality. For example, an athlete at any place, by means of a virtual reality centre, can imagine that he is skiing in the Alps, running at any altitude, etc.

6. The future also promises to bring in an interactive form of sports viewing. Amongst other things, it is predicted that viewers will be able to choose their own camera angles, and choose which event to watch if events are occurring simultaneously.

The development of such enhanced training techniques, performance-enhancing drugs, sophisticated equipment, psychological manipulation and advanced broadcasting techniques can be attributed to the development of modern science and technology. This obviously means that success in the sporting arena has become largely dependent on science laboratories rather than on athletes themselves.

The utilization of these modern techniques can only be possible if money and resources are available. This means that athletes in countries with minimal resources are automatically disadvantaged. It also leads to isolation and segregation of countries due to lack of funds and capital. Hence, victory is often mistakenly attributed to ability and skill, whereas in reality it only symbolizes wealth and resources.

There has to come a time when pure human ability will be maximised. Records cannot be broken indefinitely. This raises a further question: In the future, will man allow the use of methods which are now classified as illegal, such as drugs, for the purposes of increasing performance?

8. Competition

The focus of modern sport is almost exclusively upon a selected few. The winner grabs all the attention. The public do not support losers. The spotlight never reaches the majority of competitors because they end up being second best. Competitive sport ignores traditional beliefs such as participation and even abolishes attributes such as honesty, fairness and humility.

There is an over - emphasis on competition as a means of accomplishment as opposed to co-operation. Competition directly shapes and moulds the attitudes of competitors. When persons or groups compete, they often develop unfriendly and negative attitudes towards one another.

In addition, the audience is indoctrinated into believing that success in life belongs only to the winners and competition is the only way to breed success. People are led to believe that winning equates to strength, courage, talent and dedication, whereas losing is coupled to such negative attributes like failure, timidity and weakness.

b. Harms of Viewing and Spectating

1. Crowd Behaviour and Hooliganism

A feature which characterizes most modern sporting events is the contribution of the crowd or audience. The crowd due to its close physical contacts and large numbers, provides an ideal setting for the spontaneous accumulation of excitement. Each individual in the crowd may be overcome by a sense of euphoria due to crowd emotion.

The crowd momentarily sanctions the performance of acts which are normally forbidden in everyday life. Individuals in the crowd instantaneously become members of a group in which normal standards of conduct are redefined or overthrown. In simple words, members of a crowd act as one man, but the crowd acts as no one man would act in his normal senses. For example, the average person does not ordinarily destroy property or interfere with moving traffic, but in a victory celebration he does.

Crowd behaviour is characterized by a number of distinctive features. Firstly, a crowd is anonymous and erases feelings of self-consciousness. A typical modern sporting audience involves thousands of people, some male, some female, some drunk, some semi-naked, some singing, some screaming, and some simply watching the action. This multi-faceted setting may also destroy any sense of individual responsibility. The individual, while part of the crowd, indulges in behaviour which he would normally control, because moral responsibility has been shifted from himself to the crowd as a whole.¹⁹ There is a decrease in the level of personal accountability because the individual's responses are covered up by the responses of the many others around him.

Secondly, there is a removal of inhibitions. This is why crowd violence at sporting functions may not only cause fatalities, but also damage to property and general uncivilised behaviour. For example, on 5th May 1990, during a soccer match in Bournemouth, Leeds fans ran amok. Over 100 arrests were made not only for assault but looting and rioting as well.

Thirdly, the crowd is typified by a sense of increased suggestibility. This can be defined as a tendency to respond to stimulus in an uncritical fashion and without rational control over the nature of the response. In simple words, in a crowd, one does

things without conscious reflection and thought regarding the effects of such behaviour.

Experts believe that intoxicants (eg. drugs and alcohol) and rhythmical sounds like the beating of drums can put a crowd into a state of increased suggestibility. The analysis of a sporting audience shows that alcohol, drugs and some form of rhythm are combined in variable proportions. Rhythm is generated by synchronized clapping, dancing, waving of scarves, flags, music and songs.

An important implication of crowd behaviour is the emotional interaction. The individual's responses are affected by the responses of those around him.²⁰ His actions and emotions become reinforced as he observes the actions and emotions of others. This means that the individual may approve and even engage in acts such as violence, vulgar language, dancing, etc. This kind of behaviour should never be tolerated from society, least of all from a Muslim.

Members of a crowd stimulate and respond to one another. This increases their emotional intensity and responsiveness. This process is increased by "rhythm" and "milling". The crowd may suddenly start rhythmic clapping and shouting which may take members to higher levels of excitement.²¹ These features are all too common in sporting audiences. Is this not the explanation for the frequent occurrence of the 'Mexican wave'?

A common stance taken by many Muslims is that they simply

a A crowd phenomenon involving supporters at a sports stadium. Each individual stands up or makes a specific gesture at a timed moment which collectively appears to the onlooker as a synchronized wave.

attend sporting events to watch and that they are not affected by the crowd in any way. This claim can easily be disputed. If you find yourself moving to the rhythm of the 'Mexican Wave' or being attracted to the stadium for a sporting event in order to enjoy the 'wonderful atmosphere', you have been affected by crowd psychology to some extent.

Let us examine each element of crowd behaviour from an Islamic point of view. Firstly, a Muslim individual must maintain a sense of responsibility at all times. Each and every Muslim is accountable for his or her own actions. Hence, how can a Muslim allow this responsibility and accountability, which Islam has put on him, to be transferred to a larger group who lack all sense of morality?

Secondly, a Muslim should at all times conduct himself in a critical and thoughtful manner. He should always be rational in his actions. Hence, how can a Muslim consciously enter into a situation which threatens this rationality of thought and deed which Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*) has blessed him with?

Thirdly, a person in a crowd is affected by those around him. Here we see the beauty of Islam, in that we as Muslims are encouraged to be in the company of the pious and virtuous. Can a Muslim, in the name of sport, ever justify being in the company of those who are drunk, semi-naked and those who lack all sense of dignity, morality and decency? Never!

2. Hero Worship

Celebrities or 'sporting - heroes' are created by means of media glamour and prestige. Unfortunately, the supporting of teams and

sporting personalities have the greatest impact on our children. It is interesting to note the extent to which today's youngsters (as well as adults) imitate their sporting heroes. From wearing the Manchester United top to applying Allan Donald's "war paint" to copying the bowling technique of Waqar Yunus.

This "worshipping" of sports stars is a matter of serious concern. Muslims will prefer to dress in the colours of their favourite soccer team, rather than dressing in Islamic attire. Muslim children and even adults are familiar with the names, statistics and histories of numerous sports performers. They are always prepared to defend their heroes if even a word is said against them. One wonders if these very people will defend Islam with the same enthusiasm as they defend their sporting heroes.

Elite competition often produces athletes who value success more than the concept of being righteous or competing fairly. High-profile athletes are accepted as winners and ideal role models, despite the fact that these athletes very often defy the rules of fair play to increase their chances of winning. What impression is given to youngsters who idolize a sportsman who uses drugs illegally? 'That cheating in life is O.K, if you want success?'

Sporting heroes who may range from atheists to homosexuals become our role models. On the field, many sports stars are often seen using vulgar language or being rude and arrogant. Off the field, their personal lives may be harbouring in sin. Unless we guide our innocent children, they may well end up believing that these un-Islamic principles are meant to be followed.

Nabi (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) has said: "One will be with whom one loves." In other words, on the Day of Qiyamat, things of a like nature will be together. Hence, this Hadith serves as a

warning to those who wish to follow, imitate and behave like the non-Muslims.

It is indeed unfortunate to note that Muslim parents have allowed their children to idolize sporting heroes while totally ignoring the contributions made by the great leaders, saints, martyrs and scholars of Islam. The Holy Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) should be our perfect guide and example. Leaders like the four Caliphs (*Radiallâhu anhum*), the Sahaba (*Radiallâhu anhum*) and our pious predecessors showed far superior qualities than any of our current so-called "heroes". These great Islamic personalities had characters which were moulded from piety, honesty, righteousness, sacrifice, etc. These are our guides and teachers, not cheap sporting "heroes" who roam in the darkness of sin and who fall prey to lowly desires of lust, fame and pride.

3. "Desensitization" of Islamic Principles

The viewer or spectator while watching television is constantly bombarded with images of semi-naked women, of alcohol consumption in victory celebrations, of vulgar language, of violence and aggression and other activities which are completely prohibited by Islam. The continued exposure to these kind of images may reduce the individual's emotional sensitivity to them.

To illustrate, consider a person who has never been exposed to such Harâm things before and who subsequently experiences them. His initial response would be one of shock and disgust. By constantly being exposed to these activities, this may weaken his inhibitions. A mild effect will be that he would consider them as being normal or simply acceptable behaviour. More seriously, he could feel less restrained about performing such actions himself.

A factor which adds to this desensitization, is the fact that people watching sport for pleasure are generally in a relaxed state of mind. A state in which one is 'off guard', where one's inhibitions are lowered and when one is least suspecting. In other words, these images gain access to our inner being at a time when we least expect them to.

If the desensitization of Islamic values is occurring amongst adults, what effect is it having upon our Muslim children? It is the responsibility of parents to see that the home is a place where Islamic principles are taught and where un-Islamic norms are discouraged.

4. Conditioning

The conditioning of the mind through sport is a channel used to control the way people think and behave. If you consider this form of hypnosis through sport to be far-fetched, think of the occasions on which people have been gripped by the hysteria of a major sporting event (eg. The Soccer World Cup 1998). Consider the number of Muslims who prefer to watch cricket or soccer during Salâh times. Consider those who dream about sports while performing Salâh. However much we try to deny it, we have allowed sports to control and manipulate our behaviour.

Muslims should not allow sport to exert any form of control over our lives. The only sort of conditioning that we should permit is one which encourages the Islamic code of life. In other words, our lives should be controlled and directed according to Islamic values and ideals. We should be cautious about being influenced by any ideologies which aim to indoctrinate us with principles which threaten our Islamic belief system.

5. Fanaticism

A fanatic can be defined as a person who rejects facts, who strives to impose his beliefs upon others and who considers all other beliefs to be corrupt. He considers opposition as hateful and his enthusiasm may easily translate into violence.

Unfortunately, media publicity, broadcasting and a host of other factors have been largely responsible for transforming audiences into "sport - thirsty" fanatics. Sporting fanaticism has succeeded in breeding groups of people who "eat, drink and sleep" sport.

The intense competition and partisanship which is generated may often lead to spectator aggression. This has often given rise to physical violence which has occurred as a direct result of radical sports fanaticism. History shows many examples of tragedies in which people have been killed due to irrational fanatic behaviour. For example, the murder of Andres Escobar, a Colombian soccer player, after he scored an own goal during the 1994 World Cup finals.²²

Islam can never condone fanaticism as defined above. We as Muslims should respect the rights of all people. We should never attempt to force or impose our views upon others. Hence, sports fanaticism which encourages radicalism and lack of reason is not sanctioned in Islam.

6. Intermingling of Sexes

Physical intermingling and free mixing of men and women occurs almost without any remorse or guilt at most sporting functions. The following Hadith prohibits such behaviour:

"It is better for one of you to be pricked in the head with an iron

pick than to touch a woman whom it is unlawful to touch."

7. Singing, Dancing, Music, etc.

The light-hearted atmosphere at sporting events is augmented with rhythmic singing, clapping, dancing or similar gestures. Islam does not permit any such activities especially if these have indecent, obscene and shameless undertones.

The opening ceremonies of all major sporting events are primarily based on music and dancing. For example, the opening ceremony of the 1988 Seoul Olympics featured thousands of dancers and gymnasts and the Barcelona Games in 1992 featured world famous opera singers. Scantily dressed females are used as mascots, allowing billions of people around the world to commit Zina of the eyes.

Sporting functions also seem to attract the shameless elements of society, in the form of streakers. These are people who prefer to dash around naked in public, exposing shameful parts of the body. This animal-like instinct is not only disgusting but an insult to human dignity. What is more shocking is that intelligent, educated adults find this amusing and a pleasure to watch. This is a symptom of a morally bankrupt society. May Allāh (*'Azza wa jall*) save us and our children from being exposed to such filth.

8. Wastage of Money

Enormous sums of money are wasted by sports organisations, clubs, provinces and even countries in an attempt to entertain the public through the medium of sport. Governments of the world spend millions in sports development and promotion. It is also interesting to note that the 1984 Olympics were the first in which

a profit was made. The 1976 Montreal Olympics had a \$1 billion debt²³ after spending \$1.4 billion to stage the Games.²⁴

On an individual level, people spend hundreds and even thousands in attending sporting functions, purchasing tickets and joining fan clubs. For example, the price of a good ticket for the Opening Ceremony of the Atlanta Olympics was about \$600.

Allāh (*'Azza wa jall*) says in the Holy Qur'ān: "O children of Adam, wear your beautiful apparel at every place of worship, and eat and drink but do not be wasteful; indeed, He does not like the wasteful."^a

Are we not being wasteful, while millions of people on the face of the Earth have no food to eat and no place to sleep? Should we not be using our resources to build hospitals and houses, rather than stadiums? The construction of the 85 000 seater Atlanta Centennial Olympic Stadium, for instance, amounted to \$168 million. Can't we channel the billions that are directed towards sports in the world today, towards eradicating the social harms of our society, like drugs and crime?

9. Division

Sport, due to its competitive nature, divides people into groups. The love for opposing teams or sports stars is so intense that it divides nations, provinces, communities and even families. This division due to sport has frequently led to disputes, quarrels and even violence amongst supporters. The favouring of one team or

^a Al Qur'ān Surah 7 Verse 31.

star over another can often be traced to early childhood. This makes the idea of supporting a team or personality all the more absurd. This division creates unnecessary hatred, jealousy and malice which would otherwise never have been present.

Sport has always been an area where people have been discriminated against. Differences based on race, nationality, religion and class have on many occasions been intensified and magnified by sport.

Unfortunately, we as Muslims have foolishly allowed the folly of sport to divide and cause rifts between us as well. It is not uncommon for groups of Muslims to harbour hatred and jealousy for others on the grounds of sporting differences.

10. Smoking in Children

The effects of watching sport on television are more devastating and far-reaching than people generally imagine. For example, a survey was carried out in England to investigate whether watching cigarette-sponsored motor racing had any effect on children's smoking habits. The study found that of those boys who were not regular smokers but who watched motor racing as a favourite television sport, 12.8% became regular smokers. Of those who did not like motor racing only 7% became regular smokers.²⁵ In other words, by watching motor racing, the probability of becoming a regular smoker is almost doubled.

c. General Harms

1. Insulting Islam

Sports in recent times has caused severe damage to the name of

Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*) and to the Kalimah. Not long ago, Nike Incorporated printed the name of Allâh on a new line of basketball shoes. After severe protest by Muslims, they rendered an apology and agreed to stop selling the shoes. The Kalimah, as well, has been printed on footballs. Whatever the intention of the manufacturers, the end result is that the name of Allâh and the Kalimah are being trampled, soiled, kicked and shown absolutely no respect.

With the World Cup and the participation of Saudi Arabia, the Kalimah has been further dishonoured and desecrated. The flag of Saudi Arabia which bears the Kalimah, has appeared in the newspapers and other media formats. In the hands of non-Muslims, one can barely imagine how the Kalimah will be dishonoured. The carrying of the Saudi Arabian flag into a stadium is also a matter of concern. In an environment of singing, dancing, music, alcohol, nudity, foul language, etc. the Kalimah is utterly disrespected.

These insults should arouse anger and outrage in the heart of any Muslim. In spite of all this, how can a Muslim sit back and enjoy sports as a permissible form of entertainment. If this is the case, we need to ask ourselves some crucial questions: Do I care for the honour of Islam? How much of love do I have for Allâh and His Rasool (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*)? Will I allow Islam to carry on being insulted in the name of sports? Will I continue supporting sports, knowing the harm it is doing to my religion, to my Allâh, and to myself?

2. Nationalism

Nationalism is a state of the mind, that seeks to make the nation an effective unit and further to make it the object of man's supreme

loyalty. It aims to inspire within a person a sense of devotion or patriotism where one zealously defends national customs, beliefs and principles. The reputation of a country is enhanced through sport, because success in the sporting arena heightens a citizen's pride and promotes respect from the rest of the world.

International sport inevitably separates people into countries and nations. The playing of national anthems, waving of flags and displaying of national emblems are common practice at almost all international sporting events. The media is very often biased towards the country's own athletes. Victories by individuals in international competition are regarded as national victories. These are mere methods of conditioning people towards the concept of patriotism. They aim to generate a patriotic love for one's country.

We as Muslims should look beyond this division of people into countries and nations. The Holy Qur`ân says: "O mankind ! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allâh is the most righteous among you."^a In other words, Islam clearly denies that the distinctions based on race, colour, language or territory can be a claim of superiority of one group over another. The only real basis of superiority is one based on piety and righteous character.

We are a Muslim Ummah based on our religious belief. 'Patriotism' for a Muslim means love and adoration for one's Deen, the Sunnah, and the Islamic code of life. Hence we should never allow national and political interests to be placed above Islamic considerations.

^a Al Qur`ân Surah 49 Verse 13.

3. Politics

Despite the argument that sport unifies nations, history bears many examples where world governments have utilised sport to pursue their own political goals. Sport has time and again been affected by political battles which have resulted in worsening of relationships between many countries of the world.

Countless athletes have been deprived of the opportunity of competing internationally simply because of governments who have used sport to drive home selfish political beliefs.

Politics dictate the participation of some countries and not of others. For example, the 1960 Rome Olympics were the last in which South Africa were allowed to participate for 32 years. The International Olympic Committee were forced to bow to international pressure to punish South Africa for its racist policies.

Sport has become an international theatre where political battles are fought and where political might is used to force many countries of the world to become involved in political complexities which would otherwise never be highlighted.

4. Commercialism

Like many things in our materialistic world today, sport has become commercialized to a large extent. The worlds of advertising and sport have become inter-dependent. At the end of the day the pursuit of wealth seems to be the goal of both advertising and sport. Sport has become largely dependent on the marketing and advertising industry to promote, publicise and advertise sporting events at a local and international level. The marketing industry, on the other hand, has through sponsorship,

exploited sport in order to pursue its own capitalistic goals.

Gauging from statistics, sponsorship in South Africa seems to be increasing rapidly. In 1985 sponsorship spent was R63 million while in 1995 this figure soared to R418 million.²⁶ The worldwide annual sponsorship budget within a year after the 1992 Barcelona Olympics was expected to exceed \$5 billion.²⁷ These figures serve to prove only one thing: Marketing through the medium of sport is obviously an extremely profitable business.

Athletes have been transformed into marketable commodities. Success in the sporting arena has become a means of selling products like beer, cigarettes, perfume, paint, etc. To win a gold medal or to score a goal is probably the most important thing for the fan and athlete, but this means little or nothing to the marketing world. Corporate sponsors and multinationals are more concerned about the 'global opportunities', 'marketing segments' and the possibility of shaping the world's major sporting events in order to 'maximize profits.'

The major sports companies have used sport to advertise their products. The sports products market is a fairly powerful market in the world today. Figures show that manufacturers of sportswear and equipment have annual sales of between \$3-4 billion. This is hardly surprising since they have penetrated almost every niche in the market. Brand and product logos appear on all items of clothing including T-shirts, tracksuits, sports shoes, caps, gloves, and even socks. Logos appear on all sports equipment including balls, racquets, bats, etc.

This market is extremely successful. We notice our own Muslim youngsters feeling proud to be associated with certain brand names. How unfortunate that this form of clothing is preferred to

the simple Islamic dress of the *topi* (hat) and *qurta*.

5. Distraction and Diversion

Sport can and is being used as a tool to distract and divert people's attention. An event such as the Olympic Games captures the attention of billions of people worldwide. The Opening ceremony of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics was witnessed by about 3.5 billion people worldwide. This is more than half of the world's population. The opening ceremony of the 1998 Soccer World Cup was seen by 2 billion viewers.

Consider for one moment what these statistics reveal. Firstly, at the time of these events, more than half the world's population are placed on an identical plane. Whether one is a European or an African, an adult or a junior, a Christian or a Muslim, becomes unimportant. At this time, there is absolutely no form of distinction or differentiation between people. Each and every person who watches the action becomes a slave whose only desire is pleasure.

Secondly, this is a brilliant plot which diverts people's attention from more important issues. In other words, it allows for the calculated manipulation of sporting events at times when more significant social issues need to be down-played. For example, who cares if pornography is legalised or if thousands of people are being massacred while people are gripped by the hysteria of the soccer World Cup Final?

Sport, on an individual level, also diverts one's attention from the remembrance of Allāh, from performing *Salāh* and from performing one's necessary social and worldly duties.

6. Time Wasting

Sport undoubtedly dominates the free time of millions of people worldwide. It is a fact that sports generally consume vast amounts of time. Participation at elite level requires months of intense preparation and commitment. Watching sports as a form of entertainment also wastes precious time. Furthermore, sport has a definite element of addiction. The addictive grip of sport over its viewers is so powerful that the viewer may become a helpless victim wasting sacred hours glued to the television screen. Millions of man hours are lost due to sport which takes people away from productive, constructive work. The Brazilian economy loses \$3 billion due to World Cup fever as people skip work to watch soccer.

The "enchantment" of sport has caused family duties and social responsibilities to be neglected. More importantly, *salâh* is omitted or congregational *salâh* is missed. Taraweeh *Salâh* and fasts in the sacred month of Ramadan, have also been shrugged aside. How unfortunate that we have not realised how valuable every second is, never mind the hours wasted in the spectating of sports. Time is of such importance that Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*) in the Holy Qur'an takes an oath by time:

"By the token of time!
Verily man is in a state of loss;
but, those who believe,
and practise righteous deeds;
who enjoin the truth; and, who enjoin patience."^a

^a Al Qur'an Surah 103.

Hence, a Muslim is not permitted to waste time, more so, when this involves the interference or neglect of one's duties to Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*).

7. Extravagance and Show

Another un-Islamic practice which modern day sport thrives upon is extravagance and pomp. Many of the major sporting events include extravagant opening ceremonies which have absolutely nothing to do with sport. Millions are wasted and invaluable time is wasted, but few complain because entertainment is the name of the game.

Muslims are taught to avoid extravagance. The beauty of Islam lies in its simplicity. Hence, being flamboyant and boastful is certainly not an Islamic concept.

Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*) mentions in the Holy Qur'an:
"...but squander not (your wealth) in the manner of a spendthrift. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of the Satans."^a

Abu Sâlih reported: The Apostle of Allâh (may peace be upon him) said: "Allâh gets pleased with you for three things and gets displeased for three things. The things that please Him are that you should worship Him and join with Him no other, you should hold onto the rope of Allâh and counsel your ruler. The things that displease Him are vain talk, extravagance and asking too much."^b

^a Al Qur'an Surah 17 Verse 26-27

^b Muwatta - Imam Malik.

8. Gambling

Gambling can be defined as the practice of betting money or other valuables on games or events in which chance largely determines the outcome. It can take the form of lotteries, casino gambling, dice, cards and betting on public sports (eg. horse racing, greyhound racing, etc). The practice of betting on organized sports with the aid of a gambling broker (bookmaker) and the sanction of corrupt police officials is also a major form of gambling in many countries.

Governments are quick to approve new casinos and gambling houses because of the large tax cuts that they get from these immoral institutions. Global lottery revenues in 1995 were in the region of \$100 billion. Americans bet nearly \$500 billion on legal gambling every year.

Two examples of sports gambling are the soccer betting pools in Britain and betting on the Malaysian Premier League soccer matches. Horse racing is also a common form of sports gambling. In 1994, \$14.5 billion wagers were placed on horse racing, in the United States alone.

It should also be remembered that gambling is not a one-off thing. It can easily become compulsive and may lead to countless family problems, social conflict, depression, theft, etc. In Thailand, where gambling on soccer is very popular, a bank employee was arrested for stealing more than R800 000 in order to pay off his soccer gambling debts.²⁸

In South Africa, gambling seems to be growing as a major national pastime with the advent of national lotteries, raffles and the like. These forms of gambling may claim to raise funds for

humanitarian causes and charitable organisations and at the same time allow people to gain materialistically in the form of prizes. It is indeed sad to note that mankind has stooped to the level where rewards are needed to convince people to be charitable.

Gambling has been strictly forbidden by the Qur'ân. The Holy Qur'ân says: "They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say: 'In them is great sin, and some profit, for men; but the sin is greater than the profit.'"^a

The Qur'ân further says: "O you who believe, certainly intoxicants, gambling, idols and divining arrows are an abomination / impurity from the acts of Shaitân. Avoid them so that you may be successful."^b

9. Bribery and Corruption

It has been alleged that bribery plays a significant role in sporting events. This is hardly surprising since the stakes in the sporting world are enormous. Members of the I.O.C. (International Olympic Committee) have been accused of soliciting bribes from city officials bidding to host the Olympic Games.²⁹ Over the last number of years, soccer and cricket, especially, have been plagued with rumours of bribery and corruption.

Many examples can be quoted in which sportsmen have been accused of taking bribes in order to fix the result of games. The

^a Al Qur'ân Surah 2 Verse 219.

^b Al Qur'ân Surah 5 Verse 90.

case involving Bruce Grobbelaar, Hans Segers and John Fashinu, who were accused of matchfixing during the 1994-95 season in the English Football league, drew large publicity. Who knows how many other cases of corruption exist which never come to the forefront? Another famous example of corruption is the Malaysian football league. Hundreds of players have been banned for life and many bookies have been jailed or exiled.

For example, recently, a player of the Hong Kong national team pleaded guilty to accepting a bribe of HK\$200 000 from a book-maker in order to fix a World Cup qualifying match. He admitted to conspiring with his team mates to concede two goals in their match against Thailand.³⁰

With betting and gambling syndicates operating in many countries, it is very possible that corruption, bribery, match fixing and money scandals are more common than what the public have been led to believe.

Bribery has been specifically cursed in Islam. Thaubân (*Radiallâhu anhu*) has said: "The Messenger of Allâh (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) cursed the one who offers the bribe, the one who receives it, and the one who arranges it."^a

10. Power and Control

Sport has become one of the modern world's most effective vehicles for the display of plain, pure and undisputed power. The organizing of sporting events lies exclusively in the hands of a few

^a Reported by Ahmad and Al-Hâkim.

who have the power of manipulating the many. By following the dictates of some, sports organizers directly manipulate people's lives. In the scramble for more money, more world records, more media coverage and more power, the rights and concerns of the majority are ignored.

To illustrate, major events like the African Nations Cup of soccer (1996) and the Cricket World Cup (1992) have both occurred during the month of Ramadan. Some may argue that this is often done deliberately in order to weaken the Islamic spirit. Whatever the reason, the unwearied Muslim faced with a practical dilemma often falls prey to his desire for sport at the expense of remembering his Creator.

11. Alcohol

Alcohol is openly advertised, consumed and sold at many sporting functions. It is sprayed, showered and drunk amongst spectators and participants alike. Victory celebrations are regarded as incomplete without alcohol. This leads to a number of problems associated with drunkenness and uncivilised behaviour.

The following Hadith suffices to illustrate the need to avoid all things associated with alcohol: The Holy Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) said: "Truly Allâh has cursed wine and has cursed the one who produces it, the one for whom it is produced, the one who drinks it, the one who serves it, the one who carries it, the one for whom it is carried, the one who sells it, the one who earns from the sale of it, the one who buys it, and the one for whom it is bought."^a

^a Reported by al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah.

12. Violence

From ancient times right up to the very present, sport has always had links to violence. Sports that are linked to some form of violence can be classified into combat sports (eg. boxing and karate), killing sports (eg. bullfighting) and contact sports (eg. rugby, football and hockey). The violence portrayed by these sports affects not only participants but also spectators, officials and society as a whole.

The overwhelming pressure to win at all costs gives rise to violence amongst players and participants. This coupled to other individual and social pressures drive the athlete to contest in a ferocious and violent manner. The Springbok rugby player Johan Le Roux who bit the ear of All Black Sean Fitzpatrick and the Manchester United player Eric Cantona who gave a fan a flying kick are just two of the many examples of violence perpetrated by sportsmen. Other examples include brain damage caused to boxers and neck injuries leading to paralysis amongst rugby players.

Sport further emphasizes and highlights social pressures which may be totally divorced from the sport at hand. Social issues such as racial prejudices, territorial disputes, religious intolerance, class and economic differences, etc. are frequently the cause of crowd violence. Sport aggravates the scene by adding a further object of rivalry - victory. Groups which are already in conflict, meeting in the sporting arena and competing for a scarce commodity, victory, provides an ideal setting for collective violence.

The increased arousal or aggression caused by sport is of such magnitude and severity that it has been implicated as a causative factor for social violence. Studies have shown that viewing of sports like football may cause hostility and heightened aggression

in spectators irrespective of whether their team won or lost. This aggression caused by sport has been linked to such diverse social menaces like wife-battering and rape.

Sport cannot simply be regarded as a reflection of a violent society any more. The link between violent sport and violence in society is one which is conveniently overlooked. Individuals and society as a whole need to be informed about the devastating effects which this link can have on the human race.

13. Affiliation and Association

The supporting of a team or individual frequently causes individuals to identify and associate with that team or individual. To prove this, consider the following example. A person who supports or favours the Pakistani cricket team will say that "WE are playing" rather than "Pakistan are playing" whenever Pakistan plays cricket. Another classic example of affiliation is the wearing of scarves, T-shirts, etc. which are characteristic of a specific team or individual.

Benefits of Modern Sport

The benefits and advantages of sport in today's times have been classified in terms of physical, social, economic factors.

a. Physical Benefits

1. Health and fitness

Sports and exercise are important factors which contribute to good health. Many studies have been carried out in order to determine

the effect of exercise on health. Generally, it has been shown that sport, through physical exercise, can improve posture, promote physical fitness and good health. Modern medicine has also shown that sports can prevent certain diseases such as obesity, heart disease, osteoporosis, etc.

From an Islamic perspective, physical fitness and physical strength are qualities which need to be developed, as can be seen from the following explanation by Moulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (*Rahmatullah alaihi*):

"Hadhrat Abu Hurairah (*Radiallâhu anhu*) narrates that Rasulullah (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) said: "A strong Believer is better than a weak Believer."

"This Hadith speaks of physical strength as is clear from the explanation of the hadith by the authorities of Deen. Physical power and strength are abilities which Allâh Ta'ala loves in his servants. Physical strength has to be developed by Believers. Since this is desirable, it follows that it is a duty upon one to preserve one's health and develop one's strength while at the same time it will be un-Islamic to resort to such practices which are harmful and injurious to one's health. Excessive eating, excessive sleeping and excessive indulgence in sexual relations are destructive to one's health. In the same way, excessive reduction in food and sleep produces physical weakness.³¹

2. Preparation for Jihâd

The maintenance of good health, the development of power and bodily strength are important in preparing for Jihâd. As will be seen later, some Muslim scholars are of the opinion that one may participate in modern sports if certain conditions are met and the

aim is to build the physique in preparation for Jihâd.

3. Relaxation of the body and mind

As will be seen in Chapter 4, most of the Ulama agree that relaxing the mind and body is sanctioned in Islam. This relaxation is beneficial for the individual, in that the object of life which is to worship Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*) can be performed more earnestly and with greater devotion.

b. Social Benefits

1. Development of Social Skills

Sport is often accredited with developing social skills in the individual. These include such skills as courtesy, fair play, teamwork, etc. While this assertion may be true, it has to be pointed out that sport is not the only means of acquiring such skills. Following the lifestyle of our Holy Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) and living an Islamic life from an early age, can inculcate in a Muslim all the social skills that are required.

c. Economic Benefits

1. Employment

Sport has become a major industry due to the level of interest shown by the public. Hence, there are a significant number of people in the world today, who rely totally on sport to make a living. Avenues for earning wealth from purely sporting sources include the sale of tickets, marketing and sale of sports equipment and clothing, operation of sports facilities, researching into sport

science, publishing of specialized sports magazines and journals, etc. Some may say that the income generated from these avenues are not Halal according to the Shariah because this involves sanctioning of the many harms of sport. However, it may be argued that a Muslim who sells a bow and arrow, for example, with the intention that the Muslim community may use it to train for Jihād is surely not transgressing any of the laws of Shariah.

Perceived benefits

These benefits have been listed separately because when viewed from an Islamic point of view, they are not actually beneficial. In some cases they are actually detrimental.

1. Nation-building

Modern sport is often justified by using the argument that international sporting events promote nation-building and patriotism. While sport has the ability to unify a nation, it at the same time causes antagonism towards other nations. The nationalism and patriotism which sport generates are merely cheap emotional feelings which have no Islamic basis whatsoever. In fact nationalism is a harm and disadvantage and not a benefit.

2. Abolition of barriers

Sport claims to abolish barriers of race, colour, gender and religion. This may be true, but sport often magnifies and exaggerates such differences. Why do we need sport to abolish these barriers when Islam is a universal religion where discrimination based on race, class, colour, etc. are non-existent?

3. Material Rewards

Modern sport at professional level has become a means of livelihood for many people. The prize money received at elite-level participation is enormous. According to a magazine report, the 20 highest-paid sporting personalities for 1997 earned in the range of \$78.3 million to \$13 million.³² Many professional athletes rely totally on the money received from sport in order to make a living. In this way, sport becomes the object of life. Islamically, we need to realize that material gain in this world is temporary. Hence, we as Muslims need to give priority to spiritual values rather than materialistic ones.

4. Economic rewards for sponsors and multinationals

A percentage of the vast amounts of money generated from the sale of tickets and other forms of income from sport obviously end up in the hands of those who have vested interests in the sporting world. Sponsors obviously derive benefits from sport. The reason for this is simple. If they did not see sport as beneficial to their own motives, why do they spend enormous sums of money in sponsorship. It has already been explained that this is plain and simple exploitation of sport in order to gain materialistically. While sport is thus of economic benefit to the multinational companies, it is at the expense of the greater sporting world.

Evaluation of Benefits and Harms

Having discussed the benefits and harms of sport, it is now necessary to weigh them and to reach certain conclusions. Due to the fact that both the benefits and harms of sport are relative and general, it is difficult to compare them. The only way would be to evaluate them under a specific set of conditions and circumstances.

Hence, a number of situations will now be analyzed:

a. Watching sport at a stadium, sportsground, etc.

The primary benefit of watching sport is relaxation. The harms of watching sport at a stadium include the effects of crowd behaviour, intermingling of sexes, singing and dancing, wastage of time and money and the desensitization of Islamic principles. Hence, in this case, the harms far outweigh the benefits.

b. Watching sport on television

In this case, the only benefit that is attained is that of relaxation. However, there is considerable wasting of time and the camera occasionally focuses on something which has no link to the sport being played (for example, spectators who are not dressed properly). Advertisements are also played at certain times and these often feature Harâm elements. (for example, drinking of alcohol) Hence, here as well, the harms far outweigh the benefits.

c. Participation at professional level

A definite benefit of participation at professional level is the fitness element. Athletes at this level are usually super-fit and have good health. Competition at elite level requires motivation, perseverance and dedication, all of which are desirable qualities to develop. Unfortunately, these elements alone are often not good enough for the athlete. Drugs, cheating, aggression and jealousy frequently creep in. The strict rules of professional sport often force the participant to dress according to specific regulations (which may be un-Islamic) and may also impose other rules which may prevent a Muslim from performing his/her Islamic duty. For example, one may not be allowed to abandon play and perform Salâh at the

required time.

One may argue that a conscientious Muslim can take the necessary actions and precautions in order to protect his/her Islamic principles while still participating at elite level. This is true but idealistic. Generally, there are very few Muslims nowadays who are prepared to place their Islamic duties before their sporting pleasures. In summary, it is very difficult to participate professionally in sport and also maintain sound Islamic principles.

d. Informal participation in sport

Here the participant may become fit and improve his/her health. There is no undue pressure and hence no need to take drugs or cheat. Less hatred and pride develops. The lack of fixed rules will allow for proper dressing and performance of Salâh at the stipulated times. Hence, it would appear that the harms are not as many as participation at professional level, while many of the benefits can still be obtained.

Conclusion

The harms and benefits of sport are many. In modern times, the harms exceed the benefits by far, in number and magnitude. The harms of commercialism, media glamour and technology have come to the fore mainly within the last 50 years or so. The benefits of sport have generally remained the same since ancient times. With the changes that we are witnessing at present, who knows what direction sport will take in the future.

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CHAPTER 3

THREE MAJOR SPORTING EVENTS

Having discussed the benefits and harms of sport, a more detailed examination of some specific sporting events will illustrate to the reader the true meaning of sport. The following three sports will now be discussed at greater length:

1. The Olympic Games
2. Soccer
3. Cricket

The Olympics Games

The Olympic Games is undoubtedly the greatest sporting event of the modern world. Before analyzing the modern Olympics, it is necessary to briefly explore the Ancient Olympic Games because the modern Olympics is based substantially on the ancient Games.

The Ancient Olympics

History tells us that the Olympic Games began more than 2700 years ago. The oldest records indicate that the first Olympic Games was held in 776 B.C in Olympia, Greece. Olympia was a sanctuary where thousands of statues, temples, tombs and altars of the Greek gods were kept. The greatest shrine of them all was an ivory and gold statue of Zeus. The ancient Olympic Games were part of a religious festival held in honour of the Greek God Zeus. Thus, the motivation for staging these Games was in order to worship Zeus and other Greek gods.¹

The Olympic Games was just one of the religious festivals which were celebrated by the ancient Greeks. Athletics played an important role in these festivals because people believed that such competitions pleased the spirits of the dead.²

The first Olympics consisted of only a single footrace over a distance of 185 metres. The winner of this race had the privilege of receiving the torch from the priest which he used to light the sacred fire on the altar in the temple of Zeus.³ Gradually more events like wrestling, boxing, chariot racing and the pentathlon were introduced.

An exceptionally savage sport known as pankration which was a combination of boxing and wrestling was also included. These were battles of brute force which lasted until one of the competitors could no longer fight.⁴

Originally, the Games took place on one day only. It is believed that as the Games grew, the ceremonies lasted 5 days. The first day of the Games was devoted to sacrifices to the pagan gods and registering of athletes.⁵ On the following 3 days, sports such as foot racing, boxing, chariot racing and wrestling were engaged in. On the fourth day, 100 oxen were sacrificed as an offering to Zeus. On the final day prizes were awarded and thanksgiving sacrifices offered to the gods.⁶

In keeping with Greek mythology, the victorious athletes were crowned with wreaths from olive and laurel trees. The olive tree was regarded as sacred and those who damaged these trees were punished.⁷ Some records say that the prize of an olive wreath resembled the crown worn by Zeus. Statues were erected in honour of the winners and poems were written in their praise.

Another feature of the ancient Olympic Games was that only freeborn, male citizens could take part. Women were forbidden, on penalty of death, even to see the games. Records also tell us that ancient Olympic athletes taking part in all the competitions had to be completely naked. Initially loincloths were worn, but it is believed that during a race in the 15th Olympiad (720 B.C), one of the runners accidentally lost his costume. He ran on in this state to win the race and so the trend was set.⁸

With the decline of ancient Greek civilization, the Games ceased. In 393 C.E., Emperor Theodosius I, a Christian, banned the games as he regarded them as pagan shows. The ancient Olympics had lasted nearly 1200 years.

The Modern Olympics

The revival of the Olympic Games in the late 18th century was due to the efforts of a Frenchman, Baron Pierre de Coubertin. The first Olympics of modern times were held in Athens, Greece in 1896. The Games are held in the first year of a four-year period (known as an Olympiad). The International Olympic Committee (I.O.C), with its headquarters in Switzerland, is the chief governing body. The I.O.C is responsible for awarding the Games to specific cities and for determining the rules and regulations of the Games.

Similarities between the ancient and modern Games

There are a number of characteristics which symbolize the continuity between the ancient and modern Games:

1. The Olympic Games derives its name from Olympia in ancient Greece where the Games originated.

2. The Games are held every four years (an Olympiad) just as they were held in ancient times.

The Olympic Flame and Oath were adopted from the ancient Games and placed within a modern framework.

3. The Olympic Flame is lit by the sun's rays at Olympia, Greece, and then carried by relays of runners to the actual site of the Games. It is purely symbolic because during the early Olympics, a sacred flame burned at the altar of Zeus.

4. The Olympic Oath is taken by a sportsman from the host country during the opening ceremony and reads as follows: "In the name of all competitors, I promise that we will take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the true spirit of sportmanship, for the glory of sport and the honour of our teams."⁹ The Olympic Oath which is an important component of the opening ceremony symbolises the oath taken by competitors during the ancient Games. Before the opening of the ancient Games, athletes would vow before the temple of Zeus that they would observe the law of the Games.

Greece, as the country of origin of the Games, is honoured in both the opening and closing ceremonies.

5. During the opening ceremony, the athletes parade into the stadium, always led by the Greek team.

6. During the Closing Ceremony, the flags of Greece, the country organizing the Games and the next host country are hoisted.¹⁰ This is done to honour the original Olympics held in ancient Greece.

7. The first of the modern Olympics held in 1896 were staged in

Athens, Greece. Winners at these Games received a crown of olive branches and second place finishes received laurel crowns,¹¹ as in ancient times.

Although partly divorced from the ancient Games, ancient Greece was the root source of ideas which were later included into the Olympic Games.

8. The Olympic Flag with its five coloured rings is thought to be based on an ancient Greek motif or symbol signifying the unity of mankind.¹²

9. The word 'athlete' originates from Greek mythology. According to one source it is derived from 'Aethlius', who, according to Greek mythology, was the son of Zeus.¹³

10. The modern Olympic marathon has its origin in ancient Greece although it was not run at Olympia. It is run in commemoration of the race run by a Greek messenger called Phidippides who was a champion runner in the Olympic Games. In 490 B.C. The Battle of Marathon took place between the Persians and the Greeks. According to legend, the messenger ran all the way from the battlefield to Athens to announce the victory of the Greeks over the Persians, only to collapse and die from exhaustion after delivering the message.

11. The words 'gymnasium' and 'gymnastics' both come from the root word gymnos (meaning naked). A gymnasium in ancient Greece meant a place where the young men exercised naked.¹⁴

12. The modern pentathlon which is held at every Olympics has its roots from the ancient Games. The word pentathlon is derived from the Greek 'pente' meaning five and 'athlon' meaning contest. During

the ancient Games, athletes competed in jumping, running, wrestling, throwing the discus and throwing the javelin. The modern pentathlon consists of horseback riding, fencing, pistol shooting, swimming and cross-country running.¹⁵

13. Some of the sports which feature in the modern Games originated from the ancient Games. From ancient Greek sculptural works, pottery and excavations, it is clear that ancient Olympic athletes competed in discus, javelin, wrestling, jumping (long and triple jump) and running. Evidence also suggests that the first starting blocks for running may have been invented by the Greeks.¹⁶

14. The modern Olympic programme includes an art exhibition which is held concurrently and in the same vicinity as the Olympic Games. From 1912 up to 1948 there were actual Art contests in the fields of architecture, literature, music, painting, sculpture, etc. for which prizes were awarded.¹⁷ An art exhibition and ballet performances are still prevalent to this day. This furthering of the arts and culture is directly based upon the ancient Greek model where achievements were honoured at the Olympic Games. At Olympia, artists exhibited their works, poets recited their poems, and gods and statues were erected.¹⁸

Some Facts and Figures!

It is an undeniable fact that the Olympic Games is the most famous event of its kind in the world today. The following information should give the reader an idea of the scope and gigantism of an event of this nature.

- The opening Ceremony of the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles had an audience of 522 million people.¹⁹ For the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, this figure was estimated at 3.5 billion people.

Over the last few years these are the numbers of athletes and countries that have participated:

Year	Countries	Athletes
1984	140	About 6 800
1988	159	About 8 400
1992	169	About 9 300
1996	197	About 10 500 ²⁰

These are the amounts of money that television has paid over the years in order to broadcast the Olympic Games:

Year	Money (in \$)
1960	1 million ²¹
1968	10 million ²²
1972	17.8 million ²³
1976	34.8 million ²⁴
1992	633 million ²⁵

The 1996 Atlanta Olympics

⊗ The 85 000-seater Atlanta Centennial Olympic Stadium was worth \$168 million.

⊗ The Atlanta Centennial Olympic Park was worth \$50 million.

- ⇒ \$47 million was spent on housing in the Olympic Village which could accommodate 15 000 Olympic participants.²⁶
- ⇒ The cost of a ticket for the Opening Ceremony to have a good seat was \$636.²⁷
- ⇒ Over 11 million tickets were on sale.²⁸

Specific Harms in Modern Times

1. Politics

The Olympic Games have often been used as a means of broadcasting political views and to exert political pressure through boycotts. For example:

- a. 1936 - The Berlin Olympics were generally regarded as a theatre for the propagation of Nazism.
- b. 1956 - At the Melbourne Olympics, Egypt, Iran and Lebanon withdrew in order to protest the Israeli-led take-over of the Suez canal. The Netherlands, Switzerland and Spain also withdrew.
- c. 1968 - Over 260 people were killed in a demonstration held before the Mexico Games, when people protested against the unnecessary wastage of money in building a stadium.²⁹
- d. 1972 - At the Munich Games, 8 members of the Palestinian Black September organization reportedly invaded the building where the Israeli delegation was housed.³⁰ Two Israelis were killed and nine were taken hostage. All the hostages, five of the hostage-takers and a West German policeman died in the ensuing drama.³¹
- e. 1976 - About 20 countries (mostly from Africa) withdrew from the Montreal Olympics in protest at the inclusion of New Zealand, the country which had sent a rugby team to South Africa.³² Taiwan also withdrew because the Canadian government refused to accept the country as the Republic of China.
- f. 1980 - About 50 countries boycotted the Moscow Olympics in

protest at the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.³³

- g. 1984 - In a revenge move, the Soviet Union boycotted the next Olympics in Los Angeles.
- h. 1988 - Madagascar, Seychelles, North Korea, Cuba, Ethiopia, Nicaragua and Albania refused invitations.³⁴
- i. 1992 - Yugoslavia was banned from team sports at the Barcelona Games because of its military aggression against Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

2 Commercialism

The opening ceremony of the Atlanta Olympics, which had an audience of 3 billion viewers worldwide³⁵, was an advertising dream in reaching a global audience. The medium of television has allowed the marketing industry to exploit the idea of global advertising through sport.

Television companies and multinational commercial conglomerates are willing to pay millions of dollars in order to secure rights. During the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, television companies paid about \$600 million (which accounted for 35% of the total revenue)³⁶ and multinationals paid more than \$300 million to secure broadcasting rights, to advertise products using the Game's logos and to be official suppliers of products to the Games.

3. Extravagance and wastage

The opening ceremony of the Olympic Games smacks of immense extravagance and show. Millions are squandered in this worthless spectacle of flamboyance with which the host nation aims to prove to the world its powers of entertainment.

To illustrate, consider the Opening Ceremony of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. A crowd of 83 000 watched almost 5 hours of frivolous dancing, singing and parading which included a cast of 5500, 300 members of a marching band, 500 cheerleaders, over 300 dancers, riverboats and 30 pickup trucks.³⁷

4. Nationalism

The Olympic Games are not only a contest between individuals but more importantly, they are a contest between nations. Medals tables, although not officially encouraged, are drawn up to compare the accomplishments of countries.

Hosting the Games is seen as promoting national prestige. During the opening ceremony, all the competing countries' flags are paraded in pride and pomp. National anthems of countries are played while athletes stand proud on the winner's podium. The winning athletes parade around the stadium displaying national flags. Winning athletes who return home are regarded as national heroes. All this boils down to nothing less than an extremely shrewd and powerful ploy of promoting nationalism and patriotism!

Islam and the Olympic Games

The ancient Olympic Games were sinful and immoral because of a number of reasons. Some of these are as follows:

1. The Games were based upon pagan and idolatrous beliefs. These included worshipping of statues (eg. Zeus), swearing of oaths to idols and performing sacrifices for the gods.
2. The athletes participated completely naked. It was also decreed (in 388 B.C.) that trainers should also enter the stadium naked during the Games.³⁸

3. Statues were erected honouring the winners.
4. The Pankration was an exceptionally savage and barbaric sport with few rules. There were cases where fingers were broken, feet were crushed and where competitors were even killed.³⁹
5. Participation was not open to all. Slaves were not allowed to take part.⁴⁰
6. In ancient Greece, sport and nudity were closely related.⁴¹ This nudity was a vital element of Greek art and was expressed and depicted in the form of statues and paintings.
7. Many of the Olympic victors were worshipped as heroes after their death.⁴²
8. Spectators and pilgrims came from the remotest parts of the Greek world to offer sacrifices to the gods.⁴³

Due to the symbolic continuity between the ancient and modern Games, we can reason that today's Olympic Games are by nature and origin also immoral and irreligious.

The Olympic flame and the taking of the Olympic Oath are concepts that have a direct link to the ancient Games. These are pagan rituals which have been placed in a modern context. No sensible Muslim should be filled with happiness or joy when the flame is lit or when the Oath is taken. These are pagan idolatrous symbols which are completely un-Islamic.

The modern Olympics are also immoral and sinful because of the many harms and evils which are an essential component of the Games. These include the harms of commercialism, nationalism, corruption, extravagance and wastage, just to mention a few.

Hence, we as Muslims should call for the abolishment of the Olympic Games. No Muslim country in the world should even vaguely consider hosting the Olympics. We as Muslims should

ensure that we do not watch or support the Olympics in any way whatsoever.

Conclusion

The modern Games which do show considerable divergence from the ancient Games, nevertheless have significant grounds for controversy. Some Western writers have even called for the total abolishment of the Games. However, the Olympics have been claimed to be "the most important contemporary social movement and the most prestigious one in the world."⁴⁴ Based on the level of interest worldwide and the promotion by governments and sponsors, there is every indication that the Games will continue to grow. The Muslim Ummah needs to take active steps to protect itself from this frivolous event, or else it will be swept along the wave of destruction with the rest of the world.

Soccer

Origin

The word "soccer" is a corruption of the word "association", the correct title being "association football."⁴⁵

There are many stories of how and where soccer originated. Some of these are as follows:

- a. A football game existed in China as early as 206 B.C. By 500 C.E., round balls stuffed with hair were being used.⁴⁶
- b. A game called "harpaston" was played in ancient Greece where a ball was propelled by any means across the opponents' goal line.⁴⁷ By the 2nd century B.C. it had migrated to Rome. Romans may

have taken the game throughout Europe and England.

There was a football game in 7th century Japan.

Mob games played in medieval Europe where an inflated animal bladder was kicked, punched or carried.⁴⁸

Over the centuries, various kings and parliaments banned and prohibited the game because of its violent and rowdy nature. However, it always surfaced and never died completely.

Modern organized soccer, in the form it is played today, began in England in 1863.⁵⁰ In this year the Football Association was formed in England in order to standardize and establish rules for the game.

In 1904 the "Federation Internationale de Football Association" (FIFA) was formed by delegates from Belgium, Denmark, France, Holland, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. FIFA decided to organize a professional competition which was called the "World Cup", held for the first time in 1930.⁵¹

Spread

Soccer was carried abroad by British engineers, businessmen, administrators and travellers. Some sources reveal that soccer was thus carried by the British to Austria, Russia, Turkey and Brazil.⁵²

Soccer came to Africa mainly due to colonialism. British, French, German and Portuguese settlers brought the game to Africa.

Specific Harms in Modern Times

1. Exposure of the Satr

(parts of the body which have to be necessarily covered)

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the participants are dressed

with the *Satr* exposed. As explained before, this is not permissible. By watching soccer, the viewer inevitably also sees the *Satr* of the players.

2. Foul play

Modern soccer has developed into a war between players. Often, during the course of play, one player purposefully injures another by kicking, tripping and even punching. To prevent a player from scoring a goal, a defender will use illegal tactics to stop him. This may cause severe physical injury. Can these kinds of barbaric deeds be called sport?

3. Spectator Problems

Crowd trouble has become synonymous with soccer. Within the last 30 years, there have been many cases of crowd violence where scores of spectators have been killed or injured. Soccer hooliganism has become prevalent due to uncivilised behaviour which is closely related to alcohol and music.

The impulse which stimulates action from a crowd frequently turns a peaceful crowd into a maddened mob where violence, hatred and revenge may prevail.

The following examples clearly illustrate the extent of violence and crowd problems associated with soccer:

a. 1964 - More than 300 people were killed and more than 500 were injured in a riot in Lima, Peru after a goal was disallowed in a match between Peru and Argentina.⁵³

b. 1984 - During the European Cup final between Liverpool and

Juventus, 39 people were killed and more than 400 were injured due to crowd violence.⁵⁴ This was due to rioting Liverpool fans who were drunk and armed with sticks, iron bars and bottles.⁵⁵

c. 1989 - 94 people were killed and about 150 seriously injured during the FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest. This occurred as thousands of people, some of whom were drunk, began rushing and pushing into the stadium. As a result of the overcrowding, thousands of supporters were crushed into the perimeter fencing, which had been put there to prevent hooligans from invading the pitch.⁵⁶

Apart from these cases, there have been numerous cases of spectators invading the pitch, attacking players and stewards, looting and generally uncivilised behaviour.

4. Nationalism

Soccer is the most popular spectator sport in the world. It is played or followed in more than 180 countries. Soccer is such a powerful force that in some countries it is a second religion. The World Cup is the premier event of the soccer world in which more than 150 countries participate.

National anthems and flags are routinely associated with World Cup matches. Fans are patriotic enough to paint their faces and even their entire bodies with the colours of the national flag. Fans have on many occasions become so patriotic that they have attacked foreign visitors, correspondents and stormed foreign consulates after losing a match. Commentators are biased towards their countries of origin. The media create a patriotic atmosphere and induce malice between nations.

This picture is an ideal setting where patriotic emotions are aroused. A qualifying match for the 1970 World Cup between Honduras and El Salvador, who were already enemies, provoked a full - scale war. Rioting occurred at all three games between the two nations, which provoked skirmishes along the border. Soon after the third match, the two countries broke off diplomatic relations. Thereafter, El Salvador invaded Honduras. Honduras then retaliated with a counter-attack.⁵⁷ About 3000 lives were lost in the process.⁵⁸ Soccer had succeeded in provoking and initiating bloodshed when otherwise peace may have prevailed.

The Soccer World Cup : Some facts and figures!

☞ Over the years, the final game of the World Cup was seen by the following number of people:

Year	World-wide Audience
1970	800 million ⁵⁹
1990	1.2 billion ⁶⁰
1994	2 billion ⁶¹

☞ All the games of the World Cup were seen by the following number of people in each year:

Year	World-wide Audience
1930	434500 ⁶²
1986	13 billion ⁶³
1990	26 billion ⁶⁴
1994	31.2 billion
1998	37 billion-plus

☞ A total of 13 billion spectators saw all the games of the 1986 World Cup. These included:

about 1 billion in Africa, 246,046,000 in the Middle East, about 6 billion in Europe, about 3.5 billion in Central and South America, about 2 billion in Asia.⁶⁵

☞ The World Cup trophy made for the 1974 World Cup was produced from solid gold at a cost of 1,000,000 Swiss Francs.⁶⁶

☞ The organisers made a profit of \$20m on a \$4bn turnover from the 1994 World Cup.⁶⁷

☞ During the 1990 World Cup, the main sponsors had to pay around \$20 million each to have their names broadcast around the world for a period of one month.⁶⁸

The 1998 World Cup

Consider the effects of the latest World Cup Soccer Finals:

Mass hysteria

☞ The total forecasted television audience was over 37 billion.

☞ The Opening Ceremony had a global audience of 2 billion viewers.⁶⁹

- ⇒ The Internet site of the World Cup on the Internet had a record 56 million hits on a single day. Over a billion hits were recorded in just more than a single year of operation.⁷⁰
- ⇒ 2.6 million World Cup tickets were sold.⁷¹

Economic impact

- ⇒ France spent approximately 9.4 billion francs in organizing the tournament.⁷²
- ⇒ A businessman placed a £200 000 (R1.7 million) bet on the England-Colombia match. This was the largest bet ever placed in the history of British gambling.⁷³
- ⇒ South Africa's endeavours in the World Cup cost R10 million.⁷⁴

Political disruption

- ⇒ Political discussions in Nigeria were rescheduled to avoid a clash with Nigeria's World Cup fixture against Spain.

Community problems

- ⇒ Impoverished districts of Bangladesh had 4 nights of blackouts due to a surge in power consumption, due to 4 nights of live World Cup soccer telecasts.

Social violence

- ⇒ A Romanian teenager was killed during victory celebrations following Romania's victory over England. The teenager, who was drunk at the time, fell over and was trampled underfoot.⁷⁵
- ⇒ A man was shot dead in Port Elizabeth after he apparently made a derogatory comment following the Saudi Arabia - South Africa match.⁷⁶

- ⇒ More than 50 people were injured and 80 arrested in clashes surrounding the England - Tunisia game played on 15 June.
- ⇒ After the Opening ceremony festivities, sporadic fighting left 34 police injured and 30 people were taken into custody.
- ⇒ Before the England - Colombia match, at least 30 England fans were arrested in clashes with riot police.⁷⁷
- ⇒ A policeman was left comatose after being severely beaten by hooligans.
- ⇒ Five people were injured and 60 arrested as fans clashed with police after the Mexico - Germany match.⁷⁸

Marital problems

- ⇒ The World Cup was responsible for causing a significant number of domestic fights, divorces and wife batterings. A survey was conducted to see what women would do while their husbands were captured by the soccer craze. About 21% of them would prefer to go and see male strippers, while 6% would try to renew an old relationship.⁷⁹
- ⇒ A woman complained to police that she had been beaten up by her husband after an argument over which match they would watch on television.⁸⁰

Health hazard

- ⇒ In Beijing, an elderly fan died of a heart attack while watching the Brazil-Mexico game. This came after doctors had warned fans who suffered from heart problems, high blood pressure, etc. to cut down on watching World Cup matches.⁸¹
- ⇒ In Egypt, the sole tobacco manufacturer recorded an increase in tobacco sales. Since the beginning of the World Cup, 55 million more cigarettes were being delivered on the market per day. Apparently, this increased consumption was due to troubled soccer

fans who needed to calm their nerves.⁸²

⇒ After Scotland lost 3-0 to Morocco, about 8000 Scottish fans drank about 125 000 liters of beer. Bars ran out of beer and new supplies had to be shipped in.⁸³

Work disruptions

⇒ Reports indicated that millions of people chose to leave work for about 1 to 2 hours daily in order to watch the soccer. At times, people watched soccer till late at night and were tired at work the next day.

⇒ Some businesses even set up huge television screens to allow the employees to watch, while working.

Judicial disruption

⇒ The Iranian judiciary postponed by 4 days the trial of Tehran's mayor in order to avoid a clash with the World Cup match against the United States.⁸⁴

From the above facts and figures, we see that the 1998 Soccer World Cup affected almost every domain of life. It affected the social, economic, political, health and many other sectors of life. What more proof is required to show that the powers that be, have achieved total control over man's affairs. How tragic it is that such a trivial thing as sport, has become such a powerful influence on the life of man.

Cricket

Origin

The origins of cricket are obscure and uncertain. There are a

number of theories as to how it originated:

a. A game played by shepherds by hitting a stone, etc. while defending the wicket gate into the sheep pen.⁸⁵

b. A game where the striker defends a hole in the ground, called club - ball.⁸⁶

c. A game called stool - ball which was an Easter ball custom associated with the church. Stoolball games were between youths and maidens involved in courting.⁸⁷

d. A Scottish game called Cat and Dog.⁸⁸

Whatever the origin, most of the sources agree on the following points:

1. The first known Laws of cricket were issued in London, in 1744.
2. The Marleyborne Cricket Club (MCC) in London was formed in 1787 and was the primary controlling body for world cricket.

The Imperial Cricket Conference was founded in 1909 by representatives from England, Australia and South Africa.⁸⁹ Originally, membership of the ICC was confined to test-playing countries of the British Commonwealth. The word "Imperial" was changed to "International" in 1965, and only thereafter were countries outside the British commonwealth admitted.⁹⁰

India, New Zealand and the West Indies were elected as full members of the ICC in 1926, Pakistan in 1952, Sri Lanka in 1981 and Zimbabwe in 1992. South Africa ceased to be a member in 1961 when it left the Commonwealth, but was elected as a full member in 1991.⁹¹

Spread

During England's colonial history, cricket was transported to

countries around the world. For a South African Muslim, the development of cricket in South Africa, India and Pakistan is particularly relevant. A brief description of how cricket developed in these countries is given below:

India and Pakistan - The introduction of cricket in India and Pakistan can be traced back to the 18th century when the Indian continent was part of the British empire.⁹² The colonial settlers and administrators brought cricket to India and the army helped in popularizing it.⁹³

The first club to be formed was the Calcutta Cricket Club, in 1792.⁹⁴ Its membership was restricted to Europeans only.⁹⁵ The game was transported to Bombay a few years later. The first Indian club was the Orient Club, formed by the Parsees in 1848.⁹⁶

Some claim that the game was still dominated by the European residents both from the administrative and playing angles right up to the time when the MCC toured India officially for the first time (1926-1927).⁹⁷

Cricket was originally played by only a few Indians. However, once Indian Princes, who had enormous power and wealth, began encouraging the game, it became popular with the thousands. Coaches were recruited from England to further take the game to the masses.⁹⁸

Hence, cricket was one of the legacies which the Indians inherited from the British. This is an interesting fact because the Indians, who generally disliked the British colonialists, became engrossed in a game which was a custom of the enemy.

South Africa - Cricket was first brought to South Africa in the early

19th century by British soldiers, settlers and administrators.⁹⁹ This was probably during the early period of the Napoleonic Wars when the Cape was occupied by garrison troops (1795 - 1802).¹⁰⁰

Specific harms in modern times

1. Time wasting

Cricket consumes vast amounts of time. A limited overs match is usually a full day affair. A test match usually lasts up to 5 days. Many a time the game ends without a result. For a large duration of the time, some players sit in the pavilion and may not even get a chance to bat. Others field on the ground and may not even touch the ball for hours on end. During this time there is very little else that a player can do. Despite this, at the end of the day the players are exhausted and not in a state to perform important worldly or religious duties. This is unacceptable particularly because there is nothing constructive being done and the main purpose is entertainment.

The spectator who follows cricket on television, radio or at the stadium also wastes valuable time. It is indeed tragic that during this time, Salâh is often neglected. The sanctity and importance of Jumuah is ignored. Some do not even pray Jumuah because cricket takes preference. What a tragedy!

2. Crowd trouble

Cricket has not been as tragically affected by crowd violence as soccer. However, there are numerous signs and examples which show that the crowd at a cricket match do behave in an unruly and disorderly manner. Cricket fans have frequently run on to the pitch clothed, half-clothed or completely naked. There have been many

cases where glass bottles, nails, stones, beer-cans, etc. have been thrown at players, onto the ground or at other spectators. Racial abuse, offensive songs and insulting placards are common. Alcohol and the hot sun appear to transform a normal human being into an obnoxious hooligan who cannot think straight.

One-day cricket often creates unnecessary tension and pressure. A setting under floodlights, with loud music and plenty of alcohol creates a 'wild party' atmosphere. With all these elements there is the ever present threat that an incident will occur which will leave the game staggering in horror.

3. Cheating

At international level there have been many cases of ball tampering, unfair dismissals and unjust umpiring decisions which have created immense hatred and revenge amongst players, teams and even nations. A famous example in the last few years was the ball tampering case involving the captain of England in 1994 during a test match against South Africa.

Lessons To Be Learnt From History

From the history of the creation and spread of modern sports, we learn a number of interesting lessons:

1. British creations

Both cricket and soccer in their current forms are creations of the British. Although they may have originally been played in other parts of the world before this time, they were standardized and regulated by the British.

2. Colonialism caused the spread

In the early years, cricket and soccer spread to some parts of the world due to colonialism. Cricket spread to India due to British colonialism. Soccer spread to Africa due to the French, Portuguese, German and British colonialists.

3. Alien inventions penetrated Indigenous culture

No matter how much the indigenous peoples of the colonised countries may have hated the colonialists, the two games slowly became ingrained within the lives of the masses.

Conclusion

The facts and figures presented for both the World Cup and the Olympic Games have a number of features in common. We can reach the following conclusions:

1. The World Cup and the Olympic games are growing industries. Over the years, one notices a significant increase in the number of world-wide viewers as well as the number of athletes and officials.
2. The amount of money that is spent (wasted!) is enormous.
3. At present both these events are astronomical in magnitude. In one way or another, these events affect more than half of the world's population.
4. In the name of entertainment, sport has become a multi-billion dollar industry over the last number of years.
5. Despite being trivial and useless, sport has become a leading force in controlling man's affairs.

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CHAPTER 4

ISLAM AND SPORT

1. The Holy Qur`ân and Sport

The Ayâts from the Holy Qur`ân which have been reproduced below, use the words "*lahw*" and "*la'ib*". The Fuqaha (jurists) have used the same words for sport and games.

"Nothing is the life of this world but play and amusement. But best is the Home in the Hereafter, for those who are righteous. Will you not then understand?"^a

"Leave alone those who take their religion to be mere play and amusement, and are deceived by the life of this world."^b

"What is the life of this world but amusement and play? Verily the Home of the Hereafter, that is life indeed, if they but knew."^c

"The life of this world is but play and amusement: And if you believe and guard against evil, He will grant you your recompense, and will not ask you (to give up) your possessions."^d

^a Al Qur`ân Surah 6 Verse 32.

^b Al Qur`ân Surah 6 Verse 70.

^c Al Qur`ân Surah 29 Verse 64.

^d Al Qur`ân Surah 47 Verse 36.

"Know you (all) that the life of this world is but play and a pastime, adornment and mutual boasting and multiplying, (in rivalry) among yourselves, riches and children."^a

"So leave them to plunge in vain talk and play about, until they encounter that day of theirs which they have been promised!"^b

Tafsir on *lahw* and *la'ib*

a. "Commenting on Surah Muhammad, Allamah Razi writes that *la'ib* is that work in which there is no benefit or gain. When one gets involved in it and gives up important work, it is *lahw*; and if he does not give up important work, it is *la'ib*. Hence the means and instruments of games and pastimes constitute *lahw*, while chess etc. are *la'ib* (vol xxvii, p.73). In the interpretation of Surah Muhammad, the great commentator Allamah Razi writes that in worldly life, the time that is spent in good virtuous work and in acquiring the necessities of life is good, but that time which is spent on unnecessary work is very bad. To engage in *la'ib* (games) is the work of children. Having played, they exhaust themselves, and that work (games) comes to an end without any benefit. *Lahw* is the work of young men who often repent after some time, that it would have been better if they had not done it. Afterwards they consider the reasons, that money was lost, precious time was spoilt and the pleasure ended and yet the fondness remained unsatisfied. Thus the result is nothing but regret and remorse." (vol xxix p.233)¹

a Al Qur'ân Surah 57 Verse 20

b Al Qur'ân Surah 70 Verse 42

"The author of Tafsir Fath ul-Qadeer says that *lahw-wa-la'ib* is the work of foolish men - the unintelligent, whose intelligence is subnormal (vol ii, p54). In the commentary of Surah Hadid, it says that the work that engages one in the world and makes one forgetful about the work of the Hereafter is *lahw-wa-la'ib*." (Ibid, vol v p.174)²

c. "It is stated in Tafsir Ruh al-Ma'ani that *lahw* is that work in which a wise man does not perceive any benefit, whether it is *Harâm* or not. The difference between the two is that from *la'ib* one gets pleasure, joy and satisfaction, whereas there is no such objective in *lahw*. Hence a wise man does only that work in which there is some great objective. If a work is done without the right objective, it is *lahw* and *la'ib*." (vol vii, p.134)³

d. "The author of Tafsir Khazin (vol v, p.165 and vol vi p.155) says that engaging in those acts in which there is no benefit, is like engaging in useless acts one after another; just as foolish youngsters do."⁴

e. "It is stated in Tafsir Nazm-e Durar that the pleasure that is sought through impermissible means is called *la'ib*, and *lahw* is that work which looks pleasant and makes man forgetful about useful things; eg. singing and ogling at women." (vol vii, p.92)⁵

f. "In Tafsir Mazhari, Hazrat Moulana Thanâullah (Panipati) writes that *lahw* is that work in which the objective and result is incorrect and from which no benefit is gained. *La'ib* is that work in which there is no benefit at all, because games and pastimes are very ephemeral in nature, and both these things prevent man from worship and devotion to Allâh." (vol iii, p.258)⁶

g. "It is stated in Tafsir Nasafi that giving up useful things by

engaging in useless things, is *la'ib*." (vol ii, p.9) ⁷

2. 'Sport' in the Hadith

The term 'sport' is used to denote the activities which the Holy Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) encouraged, such as archery, swimming, horse-riding, etc. The reason for this will be explained later.

a. Horse Riding

Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*) says in the Holy Qur'ân: "And (He created) horses, mules, and donkeys for you to ride and as an adornment..."^a

Uqbah bin Âmir (*Radiallâhu 'anhu*) reported that the messenger of Allâh (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) said: Everything with which a man plays is unlawful except his shooting with arrows, and his training his horse, and his sporting with his wife; and verily these are of the truths.^b

The Holy Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) is reported to have said: "There is blessing in the forelocks of horses."^c

b. Archery

Hazrat Uqbah Bin Âmir (*Radiallâhu anhu*) also narrates that he heard Rasulullah (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) saying:

a Al Qur'ân Surah 16 Verse 8

b Tirmizi, Ibn Majah, Abu Dawood

c Reported by Ahmad

"Whoever gives up archery after having learnt it, is not of us..."^a

On another occasion, the Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) passed by a group of his Companions who were competing in archery. He encouraged them saying, "Shoot and I am with you."^b

c. Swimming

Hazrat Ibn Umar (*Radiallâhu 'anhu*) narrates that Rasulullah (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) said: "Teach your sons swimming and archery and teach your daughters sewing."^c

With regard to the participation of the Sahaba in the above activities, the jurists write:

a. "Anything done simply for futile pleasures or merely 'for fun' has no basis in Shariah as every action of a believer is orchestrated by the supreme command of Allâh and orientated towards attaining His pleasure only. And it is the culmination and perfection of faith wherein the servant attains pleasure only in fulfilling the command of his Master and his heart ingests and aspires at all times to ascertain the command of Allâh. When this becomes second-nature within man, then all his pleasures are converted and directed accordingly.

Hence, the encouragement of Rasulullah (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) to the Sahaba and their participation in such activities

a Sahih Muslim.

b Al - Bukhari

c Baihaqi

was not to appease their personal motives or to derive any worldly pleasures thereby, but to gain the pleasure of Allâh and strive to fulfil His command and physically and mentally prepare for the propagation thereof in every way possible, even though it meant laying down their lives for it, which they practically demonstrated to mankind."

b. "The racing, wrestling and archery which Rasulullah (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) encouraged should not be viewed as sport in the way people of this time understand sport. Since these were activities associated with Jihad, he encouraged them."

c. "Their primary objective was to prepare themselves for Jihâd and the worldly benefits were secondary."

d. "For this, on the basis of Hadith, the Ulema have stated that horse-racing, donkey-racing, mule-racing and human race competitions should be held with the intention of preparing for jihad. This is mustahab (praiseworthy) and for this, one will be recompensated. Similarly, sword-fighting, archery and in today's times, practising with modern weapons like firearms, machine guns, anti-aircraft guns, tanks, submarines, planes, etc. on land, sea and air, and the time and money spent on them will gain recompense, provided the intention is for jihad. If such exercises and competitions are held and prizes are given so that people are more and more induced to be ready for defending and protecting their religion and country, or one-sided bets are offered, it is all permissible; i.e. he who completes the race first or excels others in a competition will be given a prize. However betting from both sides is not permissible, it is haram."⁸

d Foot racing

The Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) himself raced with his wife. Hazrat Ayesha (*Radiallâhu `anhâ*) said: "I raced with the Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) and beat him in the race. Later when I had put on some weight, we raced again and he won. Then he said, 'This cancels that', referring to the previous occasion."^a

Regarding this Hadith the jurists write:

a. "The Hadith regarding Nabi's (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) race with Hazrat `Âishah (*Radiallâhu `anhâ*) cannot be cited as a basis for encouraging sport because in his entire life, Rasulullah (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) raced with her only on two occasions. When he did so, he instructed the others to leave the place so that the race could take place in privacy."

b. "The Hadith relating that Nabi (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) ran a race with Hazrat `Âisha (*Radiallâhu `anhâ*) once while they were on a journey wherein Hazrat `Âisha (*Radiallâhu `anhâ*) outshone Nabi (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) and sometime later wherein Nabi (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) beat her to the draw was a manifestation of the affectionate bond of love that existed between them and how matrimonial rights should be conducted as discussed under the chapter of Conjugal Rights and Intimacy between husband and wife in the books of Hadith. And this is actually a practical demonstration of another Hadith wherein Nabi (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) had reiterated:

^a Ahmad and Abu Dawood.

'Every such engagement of man which entails play and amusement is null and void except archery, training one's horse and playing with one's wife, for these things constitute righteousness.' "

c. "As for the race with Ayesha (*Radiallâhu anha*), this is narrated only by her and no other Sahâbi (*Radiallâhu anhu*). This makes it obvious that this was in absolute privacy. Actually this race was not in the form of some sport. Rather, it was more in the form of playfulness and a manner of mirthful activity as is common in a healthy husband and wife relationship. If one practices this sunnah in the same manner (i.e. in absolute privacy) with one's wife, by all means. However, it cannot be used to justify the indulgence in modern day sports.

e. Wrestling

The Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) once wrestled with a man called Rukanah who was well-known for his strength, throwing him down more than once. (Abu Dawood).

This Hadith has been explained as follows:

"The Hadith mentioning Rasulullah's wrestling with Rukanah is not encouragement for sport because the event took place at the request of Rukanah who wanted to ascertain whether Muhammed (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) was a Nabi or not. Rasulullah's victory over Rukanah was by way of Mu'jizah. This Hadith is not an encouragement for sport."

3. Relaxing the Mind and Body

It is important to outline the Islamic stance on relaxation. With regard to relaxing the mind and body, there seems to be a general

consensus amongst the different Ulama. The following are the views of four prominent South African jurists:

a. "Says the Qur'ân:

'Undoubtedly it is only through the Remembrance of Allâh that the hearts find contentment and satisfaction.' Ar-Ra'ad verse 28.

Says the Hadith:

'And your body also has a right over you.' Bukhari

Hence to relax the body and mind and to maintain its physical well-being has been acceded to in Shariah, however, remaining within the limits of Shariah thereby and without exceeding the bounds and not engaging in any such activity which will make one unmindful and heedless of Allâh."

b. "Islam recognizes that Allâh has created human beings with needs and desires, so that, as they need to eat and drink, they also need to relax. The following incident substantiates that in Islam there is a time and place for everything permissible. Hazrat Hanzalah (*Radiallâhu `anhu*) states: Hazrat Abu Bakr (*Radiallâhu `anhu*) met me and asked, "How are you, Hanzalah?" I replied, "Hanzalah has become a hypocrite." He said, "SubhanAllâh! What are you saying?" I replied, "When we are with Allâh's Messenger (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*), he mentions the Fire and the Garden until it is as if we can see them. But when we leave Nabi's (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) company and play with our wives and children or busy ourselves with our properties, we forget much." Hazrat Abu Bakr (*Radiallâhu `anhu*) said, "By Allâh, I have experienced the same thing." He and I then went to visit Nabi (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) and I said, "O Messenger of Allâh (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*), when we are with you, you talk about the Fire and Garden until it is as if we can see them. Then we go out and play with our wives and the children and deal with our

properties, and we forget much. Nabi (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) then said, "By Him in Whose Hands is my soul, if you were to continue at the same level at which you were when with me in remembering Allâh, the angels would shake hands with you when you are resting and when you walk about, but, O Hanzalah, there is a time (for this) and time (for that)." He repeated this phrase three times.^a

Hazrat Ali (*Radiallâhu `anhu*) said: "Minds get tired as do bodies, so treat them with humour" and "Refresh your minds from time to time, for a tired mind becomes blind."

Pastimes are permissible provided that they provide the participant with relaxation and exercise and at the same time none of the laws of Shariah are compromised eg. dress, intermingling of sexes, gambling and betting etc."

c. "...in terms of the Shariah, it is permissible for Muslims to relax the mind and body provided it does not interfere with the basic obligatory and compulsory Islamic duties placed upon him/her. However it is declared Makrooh (abominable) in Shariah to engage in meaningless pastimes."

d. "Relaxing the body and mind are not just permissible; they are a requirement. The reason is obvious. With a refreshed body and mind one can engage in one's object more earnestly. However, the relaxation must not be in such a way which results in transgression of the laws of Shariah or in diversion from one's object of life.

^a Mishkat Sharif, p.197-198.

4. Prohibited Sports

A number of sports have been explicitly prohibited by the Qur'ân and Hadith. These include:

a. Playing with dice

The Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) is reported to have said: "He who plays with dice is like the one who handles the flesh and blood of swine."^a

b. Games of Chance and Card - playing

Abdullah bin Amr (*Radiallâhu `anhu*) reported that the messenger of Allâh (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) prohibited intoxicants, games of chance, card - playing and *Gabâirah* (a kind of wine).^b

^a Sahih Muslim, Ahmad and Abu Dawood.

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CHAPTER 5

THE MUSLIM AND 'MODERN SPORT'

The term 'modern sport' is used to denote those sports which are characteristic and feature in the modern world. These include soccer, cricket, tennis, etc. played and watched in today's modern era.

1. Participation in 'Modern Sport'

Jurists differ in ruling as regards participation in such sport. Some allow participation under certain conditions and within limits while others prohibit it altogether. These are the rulings given by 3 prominent South African jurists:

a. "In view of all types of modern sport such as cricket, soccer, tennis, etc., being *lahw* (futility), in emulation of the kuffâr and accompanied by a host of immoral factors, such sport is not permissible in Islam. Participation, watching and associating in any way whatever with these sporting activities are not permissible."

b. "Physical fitness and health consciousness is emphasized in Islam. Therefore, keeping these objectives in mind, if a person participates in any of the 'modern day' sport, it will be permissible on condition that:

- 1) his attire conforms to Shari regulations;
- 2) his involvement in such a sport does not make him negligent of his religious obligations;
- 3) no form of gambling is involved in such an activity;
- 4) he does not become the cause of others neglecting their religious

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- 1) his attire conforms to Shari regulations;
- 2) his involvement in such a sport does not make him negligent of his religious obligations;
- 3) no form of gambling is involved in such an activity;
- 4) he does not become the cause of others neglecting their religious

duties;

5) intermingling of sexes does not take place;

6) his intention be solely to build the physique in preparation for Jihād.

c. "Modern sport on an organised level has gone far beyond the boundaries of exercise or relaxation. Besides becoming an obsession for many, a great number of those who participate in such sports end up in untold vices. Even in this country, visiting Muslim teams have displayed extremely un-Islamic behaviour on and off the field. The attendant evils totally preclude the permissibility of participating in such sports or spectating them. The intermingling of the sexes, un-Islamic dressing, etc., are just a few of the sins that occur in almost every type of modern sport. Thousands of Muslims also have become so obsessed that they miss their salāh, sometimes even in the month of Ramadhān, for the sake of sport. What takes a person away from his obligation towards Allāh Ta'ala can never be acceptable.

The organised modern day sports are totally out of the question. If informally, a person occasionally plays some sport for the purpose of exercising his body or relaxing his mind, there is no harm in it provided that no transgression of the Shariah occurs."

d. "If the object of a game, whether it is ball, football or any other game, is for passing time, it is makruh-e tahrīmi. If the purpose is to cheer oneself up and remove weariness or to gain strength, it shall be permissible with the condition that there should be none of those acts that have been prohibited by the Shariah. Allamah Shami has stated that in contest, horse racing (similarly, any other competitions) if there is no betting from either side and the purpose thereof is not merely a pastime, then it is permissible. (Shami, vol v, p355) It is evident from this that if the said games are not mere

times, then they are permissible. Football, in itself, is also a game and so it shall be permissible. But today a number of abominable and haram things have entered it. For example, that part of the body which should be covered, is kept bare, and this has become a rule of the game, just as the cricket uniform has become necessary.

More and more people are taking part in such games in which the body remains bare. To play with such people and, similarly, to meet them is not free from abomination (karāhat). Hence to play football in the present conditions is abominable (makruh)."^a

e. "Regarding games and sports, Hazrat Maulana Hakim ul-Ummat in his fatwa, called them makruh tahrīmi and helping cricket teams, clubs and societies financially is also makruh tahrīmi.

The Muslim society, as a whole, in all its different sections, commands a distinct identity. Hence in games also, the Muslim community should have a separate position. And this section is such that there should be preparation for devotion and jihad in it. If Muslims must have some games and sports for pastime, they can hold athletic meetings, horse racing, games of archery, target-shooting, etc. which may be useful in the field of battle." - Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (*Rahmatullah alaihi*)¹

f. "Hence, on the authority of the Tafsir, Hadith and Fiqh, it is impermissible to play those games which have such inherent evils and which make one forgetful of the Hereafter, and since there is no advantage whatsoever of the world or religion in listening to cricket-

^a Fatawa Dar ul-Ulum Deoband (vol viii, p.390), issued by Mufti Maulana Mohammad Shaf'ee.

commentary, it is also impermissible."²

2. Watching or Spectating 'Modern Sport'

The jurists again differ in opinion with regard to spectating modern sport. They have commented as follows:

a. "As far as watching and spectating any such activity / sport is concerned, it should be understood that involvement in any such engagement which makes one forgetful of Allāh and takes one away from the Remembrance of Allāh is considered futile and diversional in Islam. Furthermore, when there is no spiritual nor worldly benefit therein except temporary amusement and fake pleasures which serves detrimental to one's Ibādah and recognition of Allāh and which also entails exposure and viewing of the *Satr* in most cases which is Harām, such activities should most explicitly be avoided. It is mentioned in a Hadith,

"There are two such bounties in which many people are duped and deceived, (namely) sound health and leisure time."

Hence, spectating any such 'modern-day' sport may not be sanctioned in any way. Such time should rather be made fruitful by becoming involved in more profitable and deeni-orientated activities which will lead a person closer to Allāh."

b. "Watching modern sport such as cricket, tennis, soccer, etc., is regarded in Shariah as Harām and prohibited when on account of such indulgence Salāt etc. is neglected and/or the rules of Shariah with regard to any aspect therein are violated."

c. "If a sport is permissible, then to watch it is also permissible provided that the following conditions are fulfilled:

- 1) it should not distract one from fulfilling one's obligations to Almighty Allāh,
- 2) the dress code of players is appropriate,
- 3) the environment in which the match is watched is not harmful to one's Deen for example, dress of spectators, alcohol, betting etc."

For the purpose of evaluation, it would be fair to classify events such as the Olympic Games, the soccer, cricket and rugby World Cups as contemporary or modern-day sport. Let us evaluate the permissibility of watching these sporting events in terms of the ruling 2c above.

Firstly, watching these events clearly consumes time and in many cases distracts one from fulfilling one's obligation to Almighty Allāh. In the few cases where these sporting events do not prevent the devout Muslim from remembering Allāh, the following two conditions mentioned in the ruling are most definitely not adhered to.

Secondly, the dress code of players or participants in most cases is inappropriate. The gaze of the spectator is usually cast onto the *Satr* of the participants. The Hadith prohibiting this has been mentioned earlier.

Thirdly, the environment in which these sports are watched are undeniably harmful to one's Deen. The dress of spectators is usually obscene, alcohol is openly consumed, intermingling of sexes takes place and there is singing and dancing.

Hence, watching any such modern-day sporting event can most certainly not be condoned. Apart from the above three conditions, there are a host of other harms which are a feature of modern-day sport. Based on even the most lenient of the above rulings, watching

these events either on television or live at the respective venues cannot be justified.

3. Indoor Games

a. Scrabble

Moulana Mahmood Ashraf Uthmani of Darul Uloom Karachi says the following: "This game, in which words are made from letters, is in itself beneficial as a mode of learning. Generally, there is no gambling in it. Therefore if there is no unreasonable absorption in the game, it is permissible. There is nothing wrong with playing this game."³

b. Chess

The majority of Ulama regard the playing of chess as impermissible. This is irrespective of whether gambling occurs or not. This is the ruling of a prominent jurist:

"Playing of chess is not permissible whether the element of gambling is found or not. Imam Qurtubi (*Rahimahullah*) has written under the commentary of the verse:

'O you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, (dedication of) stones, and (divination by) arrows are an abomination of Satan's handiwork...'^a

He writes:

"This verse extols the prohibition of backgammon and chess whether the element of gambling exists or not."

^a Al Qur'ân Surah Al-Ma'idah verse 93.

The Ahâdith have also very stringently outlined the playing of these games. Nabi (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) has said that the one that plays chess has in fact stained his hands with the flesh and blood of a pig.^a

In another hadith it has been mentioned that he has disobeyed Allâh (Sahih Muslim) and the curse of Allâh is upon such a person and Allâh will not look at him with mercy on the day of Judgement. (Dailami)

The playing of chess will therefore not be permissible under any circumstances."

Hadhrat Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanwi (*Rahmatullah alaihi*) has dealt with this subject in detail. What follows are extracts from his writings, which summarise the stance on chess quite well:

"Some claim that according to the Mazhab of Imam Shâfi'î (*Rahmatullah alaihi*) the playing of chess is permissible, hence if we indulge in it we shall be following Imam Shâfi'î's Mazhab. Know that it is not permissible to abdicate the Mazhab of your Imam if it is based upon the Qur'ân and Ahadith and act on the Mazhab of another Imam. To follow the Mazhab of another Imam without a dire necessity is merely doing so for the pleasure of one's *nafs* (desire), and this is not permissible.

Now, with regard to the claim that Imam Shâfi'î (*Rahmatullah alaihi*) gave permission to play chess, it must be stated that this was Imam Shâfi'î's first view. And even in this first view of his, he fixed certain conditions for its permissibility, e.g. involvement in the

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games must not be to the extent that the performance of Salât is delayed from its fixed time; the games must not be played abundantly, absorption in it must not be so much that the answer to someone's salâm is not given, etc. These conditions are not to be found nowadays when this game is being played. Above all, is the fact of Imam Shâfi`î's retraction of his earlier view. In the Kitab, Nisâbul Ihtisâb it is clearly narrated that Imam Shâfi`î (*Rahmatullah alaihi*) retracted his view of chess being permissible. Thus now, no one may make the Mazhab of Imam Shâfi`î (*Rahmatullah alaihi*) a shield for the assertion that chess is permissible. Imam Nawawi Shâfi`î (*Rahmatullah alaihi*) states in his Kitab, Sharhul Muslim that the playing of chess according to Imam Shâfi`î (*Rahmatullah alaihi*) is Makrooh.

Furthermore, besides Imam Shâfi`î (*Rahmatullah alaihi*) the other three Imams, viz. Imam Abu Hanifah, Imam Mâlik and Imâm Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (*Rahmatullah alaihi*) are unanimous on the prohibition and non-permissibility of chess."

c. Video and Computer Games

With the advent of computers, entertainment and recreation has changed from the more traditional and physical forms to technological forms. TV-games, computer software games, video and arcade games (commonly found in shopping centres, malls, cafes, etc.) seem to have taken over. The computer games industry can be ranked as a leading form of entertainment in today's times. It is a massive and growing industry. In 1992, consumers spent \$10 billion-plus on video games.⁴

Computer games are a major pastime amongst children, teenagers and even adults. With this in mind, the developers of computer

games target specific niche markets including toddlers, children 4 - 8 years of age, teenagers and adults.

Before analyzing what the Muslim jurists say about these games, let us analyze what these games are actually about.

Computer games are a creation of the West. Hence, they are in most cases by nature, purpose and content, un-Islamic. There are at present many software packages on the market which have immoral and detestable elements in them. A brief review of some computer magazines shows that packages contain amongst other things:

- a. Violence and murder
- b. Racism
- c. Sex and nudity
- d. Foul language, insults
- e. Satanism, spells, magic and voodoo
- f. Evolution
- g. Polytheistic or Biblical ideas.

These games may be educational, purely for entertainment or a combination of the two ('edutainment'). They have a number of positive and negative aspects which need to be mentioned.

Benefits

1. They are educational, informative and instructive.
2. They develop problem-solving abilities.
3. They improve the memory.
4. They build self esteem and confidence.
5. They increase hand-eye coordination and response time.

Harms

1. They are highly addictive.
2. They may encourage antisocial behaviour.
3. They may cause physical damage (headaches, blurry vision).
4. They may teach aggressive tendencies.
5. They may damage a child's cognitive development.

Islamic Perspective

Moulana Mahmood Ashraf Uthmani, in his book, categorizes video games into those which have pictures of animate objects and those that do not. He explains as follows:

"In those video-games in which there are no pictures of animate objects but,

- a. One plays with pictures of inanimate objects eg. driving of a car or motorcycle or piloting an aeroplane or helicopter, or sailing a ship, etc. or such sports where one has to hit a target, or
 - b. There are pictures of animate objects but they are so unclear that they cannot be called a picture, i.e. the eyes, nose, ears and mouth, etc. in these pictures are not clear, in fact, it is only the form of a sketch or outline, then in these two cases, for the purpose of occasional recreation, sharpening of the intellect and for mental presence, there is perhaps some Shari scope for it. However, it should be played in the following manner:
1. There is no gambling included in it.
 2. Salâh is not missed.
 3. The rights of others are not destroyed.
 4. It does not affect one's important work.
 5. There is no extravagance.
 6. One does not become engrossed.

In those games in which pictures of animate objects are portrayed, playing is not permissible due to the pictures. Especially due to playing it:

1. the prohibition of animate objects is removed from the heart,
2. Salâh is missed,
3. the rights of others, teaching and important work is affected and
4. wastage and engrossment in the game most definitely occur.

Besides this, by being engrossed in these games, instead of attaining recreation, one becomes more tired mentally due to which one's teaching and important work is affected."⁵

It is important to understand that computer technology has enormous scope and potential, be it in educating, entertaining or communicating of ideas. It is in this very light that it can become a powerful and dangerous tool in the hands of those who wish to influence society (especially the young). The young who are a common target market are very vulnerable. Games with sinful contents may cause deterioration of morals and may teach a child un-Islamic ideas.

Parents must exercise extreme care with regard to the purpose for which computers are being used in the home environment. This may be a problem because of the generation gap. Parents may know less than their children about computers. Hence, parents must lay down the rules as regards when and for what purpose the computer is to be used for.

4. Sports as an Epidemic

It is important to determine whether or not sport has reached epidemic proportions within the Muslim community. In other words, has sport reached such proportions that cannot be tolerated

on the basis of Islamic principles? To answer this question we need to define a standard or criterion by which modern sport can be measured.

For a Muslim, any activity that is engaged in should not divert or prevent him from performing and fulfilling his religious obligations. This is a broad principle and standard by which we can establish whether modern sporting interest within the Muslim community is within acceptable levels or not.

Firstly, it is an open reality that sport has the ability to distract a person from the remembrance of Allâh (*'Azza wajall*). Sport has on many occasions prevented Muslims from performing Salâh. How many times have Muslims not been guilty of watching or playing soccer or cricket during Salâh times? Does sport not prevent Muslims from reciting the Qur'ân, from performing Zikr, etc. during the month of Ramadan? This addictive quality of sport also clouds the mind of one engaged in the remembrance of Allâh (*'Azza wajall*). It is not uncommon for Muslims nowadays to discuss sport in the Musjid and while making wudhu. It is indeed unfortunate to see Muslims staying awake after Sehri in the month of Ramadan to watch cricket. How unfortunate that the very same Muslim will not stay awake after Sehri to perform Ibadat, if the cricket is not on. How tragical that the enthusiasm that exists for cricket quickly vanishes when it comes to performing Salâh, reciting the Qur'ân, engaging in Zikr, etc.

Secondly, sport has managed to consume the spare time of many a Muslim. Muslims have even granted priority to sport over religious and essential worldly obligations. It has become the focus and object of our social discussions and interactions. Do we enthusiastically discuss Islam in the same way that we converse about sport? Unfortunately not.

Thirdly, sport has reached fanatical levels in certain portions of the Muslim community. It is not uncommon to see Muslims in their thousands attending cricket matches where Pakistan are involved. It has for long been a trend amongst Muslims to purchase and wear soccer T-shirts, scarves, etc. of English football clubs. Further, Muslims are very widely read and informed about the latest performances, players and statistics regarding sport. How unfortunate that this kind of interest is seldom shown towards past and current events in the Islamic world.

Fourthly, sport is openly encouraged despite it being coupled to a host of immoral and potentially harmful attributes. These harms which frequently ridicule and ignore basic Islamic teachings are conveniently ignored. Indirectly, sport is glorified and honoured whereas Islamic teachings are ignored.

Fifthly, sport is encouraged and recommended by parents, teachers and leaders alike. This has come about because of the acceptance of sport as a norm or convention. In addition, sport is encouraged with no feelings of guilt despite the numerous harms of sport. There is very little or no discouragement of fanaticism, hero worship and wasting of money and time with regard to sport.

The reasons above prove that sport has most definitely reached alarming proportions within the general Muslim community. Even though this statement may be questioned by some, it is a tragedy if even one Muslim neglects or omits one Salâh due to sport. If one Muslim consciously ignores his essential religious obligations to Almighty Allâh (*'Azza wajall*), the misfortune would be sufficient to demand attention.

5. Why this epidemic?

In order to find solutions to the problem, we first need to determine why sport has reached such alarming proportions in the Muslim community?

Firstly, the individual Muslim, living in a non-Muslim country, constantly faces a dilemma with regard to the environment in which he lives. In a country like South Africa where the Muslim community is a minority, it is not surprising that alien ideologies are unfortunately allowed to erode the Islamic code of life. The individual Muslim needs to be firm and strong in belief in order to avoid the various sources of temptation within this un-Islamic environment.

Unfortunately, erroneous dictates of foreign cultures have become norms within the Muslim community. For example, perceptions that this world is an end in itself and as such life should be enjoyed by engaging in such activities which provide for maximum satisfaction of the desires. Worldly pleasures have gained priority over the more important abode of the Hereafter (Akhirah). In the sporting context, Muslims have also started believing that peace of mind can only be achieved through sport.

The Western media is flooded and obsessed with sport. Almost every newspaper and many magazines make some sort of reference to sport. Television is swamped with sport. This widespread coverage of sport has revolutionized Muslim homes. The ease of access to sport due to television is a major reason why sport has reached alarming proportions within Muslim society.

Secondly, Muslim parents, teachers and even some Ulama openly encourage sport, without setting any limitations. The interest in

sport shown by Muslim adults together with a culture of hero worshipping of sportsmen have made children falsely believe that modern sport is totally acceptable under all conditions. The common Muslim is seldom discouraged to become a sporting fanatic.

Thirdly, sport has become a norm within Muslim society. The Muslim who shows little interest in sport becomes marginalised in public discussions. Muslims believe that modern sport is an acceptable means of public interaction.

6. Solutions

The Muslim who is strong in belief and conviction will realize that any activity which he engages in should not divert or prevent him from fulfilling the commands of Almighty Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*). This conviction would be sufficient to direct his actions and thoughts accordingly. However, this can prove more difficult for the common Muslim who has become fanatical or addicted to sport. Based on the reasons for sport becoming an epidemic, the following ideas are offered to help solve the problem:

- a. Muslim parents, teachers, community leaders and the Ulama need to educate and advise children and the youth regarding participation, spectating and involvement in sport.
- b. Muslim newspapers, newsletters and other print media need to constantly publish literature in order to educate the Muslim public about Islam and sport.
- c. Muslims need to prevent alien cultures from contaminating our Islamic beliefs. Hence, we should avoid watching sports on television which we know cause more harm than good.
- d. Muslims should avoid wasting time and money to attend major sporting events.

e. The Islamic media, be it print or otherwise, should decrease coverage and reporting of modern sport.

f. Islamic institutions, should encourage students to engage in swimming, archery, horse riding, etc., rather than modern sport like cricket, soccer, etc. Those activities which have been encouraged by the Hadith should be taught to students with the intent of maintaining good health and training for Jihād.

As mentioned earlier, people participate in sports due to extrinsic motives. These include material rewards, name and fame, etc. If Muslims can only realize that these are secondary to man's existence. Man has been created to worship Allāh (*'Azza wa jall*). If this becomes our priority, then a search for extrinsic motives will vanish.

As has been mentioned before, the first acquaintance with sport usually comes in childhood and is often due to adult influences. Hence, top performers, coaches, teachers and parents may easily persuade the young to grade sport incorrectly. It is therefore imperative that the elders set the correct example and further educate the younger generation suitably.

In his book, *Khel-kūd Aur Tafreeh Ki Shar'i Heysiat*, Moulana Mahmood Ashraf Uthmani reaches the following conclusions:

"1. A person should value every moment of life and must spend his valuable time correctly with great care.

2. It is not correct to make play and sport the object of one's life in any condition. To do so, whether it is on an individual or congregational level is calling towards destruction in this world and the hereafter.

3. In Islam, laziness and indolence is abhorred, whereas activity and cheerfulness is desired in the Shariah. Therefore, those recreational

activities which are within the permissible boundaries of Shariah, has an objective and one does not make it the aim of one's life, are permissible in the Shariah.

4. From all the different codes of sports, one should choose such sports which Nabi (*Sallallāhu alaihi wasallam*) has exhorted and wherein assistance and benefit in Jihād and the fulfilling of rights is established."⁶

7. Alternatives

As explained earlier, the belief that modern sport and entertainment is acceptable, is fast invading the Muslim Ummah. Muslims are placing greater emphasis on this world and less on the hereafter. When this is reversed (that is, when we realize that this world should be used as preparation for the hereafter), all our actions and deeds will be directed accordingly.

The following suggestions will relate to each individual depending on one's degree of involvement in sport. These suggestions are offered due to our neglecting essential religious and worldly responsibilities, never mind any other praiseworthy contribution that we could be making to society.

Firstly, if sport has managed to prevent or divert us from performing Salāh, we should immediately prioritise Salāh. Secondly, if sport interferes with our worldly and social responsibilities, then we should reverse this state of affairs. Thirdly, we should aim to increase our involvement in optional noteworthy activities such as Zikr, reciting the Qur'ān, etc. Fourthly, we should constantly make attempts to read and learn more about Islam and the Muslim world. Fifthly, we could involve ourselves in community activities like Islamic lectures and programmes. Sixthly, we should attempt to fulfil the rights of those around us (i.e.

parents, friends, children, neighbours, etc).

If we as Muslims can only direct our energies in the correct avenue we will not only improve our own lives but also contribute towards the well-being of society as a whole. By doing these things we should realise that sport and entertainment is secondary and of lesser importance. We should also come to realize that Islam will instill in us a deeper peace of mind and contentment of heart than any modern sport and entertainment ever will.

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CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY

Defining 'Sport'

A detailed study of the development of sport through the centuries leads one to the conclusion that there is a degree of difficulty in defining sport. Sport in modern times coupled to its commercial and political variants differs enormously from sport a century ago.

Similarly, there is significant variation regarding the 'sport' which the Holy Prophet (*Sallallāhu alaihi wasallam*) encouraged (such as archery, swimming and horse-riding) when compared to their modern 'equivalents'. There appears to be considerable differences in the purpose and the environment in which these sports are performed. For example, swimming in modern terms involves exposure of the *Satr* and participants being watched by members of the opposite sex. Hence, while swimming is allowed in Islam, swimming as we know it in the modern world has many *Harām* components and cannot simply be allowed. In summary, from an Islamic point of view, any modern sport needs to be examined whether or not it has any links to traditional Islamic activities.

Sports Epidemic

Sport today has become a way of life for millions of people worldwide. With the advent of modern technology such as the Internet and Digital Satellite Television (D.S.T.V.), sporting interest worldwide is showing signs of increasing manifold. D.S.T.V., for

instance, boasts exclusive sporting channels which give the viewer detailed coverage of sporting events from every part of the globe.

The potential and scope of sport is enormous. The ease of access to sport due to media coverage, especially television, makes sport a very powerful instrument. Hence, it is not surprising that sport is and will continue to exert influence over the political, economic and social domains of everyday life.

Sport has reached such alarming proportions in society due to its addictive potential, that it is and will increasingly be used to transmit subliminal as well as conscious messages of a political and commercial nature.

Many Muslims, like the rest of humanity today, have become passionate sports lovers. The effect of the Western media coupled to our spiritual decline have allowed sport to become the object of our existence. Hence, it will be fair to conclude that sport has reached epidemic proportions amongst mankind in general and the Muslim community in particular.

Aim and Objective of Sport

While it outwardly appears that athletes and participants aim to reach their own personal goals, a deeper search reveals that the aims of sport are more complex than simply winning a medal, breaking a record or scoring a goal. Power, money and purposeful diversion seem to be objectives which are becoming more and more dominant. Although the Olympic Charter states in no uncertain terms that its goals are "fair play", "human dignity" and "educating youth through sport practised without discrimination", any normal person can see that this is hypocrisy personified.

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From an Islamic perspective, we should never allow sport to become the aim and object of our lives. Our objective in life is to gain the pleasure of Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*). Hence, the activities that we engage in should be directed at gaining Allâh's (*'Azza wa jall*) pleasure, and not His wrath.

Further, the purpose of engaging in such activities should not be to satisfy worldly lusts like fame, glory and riches. It should primarily be in preparation for Jihâd and to relax, exercise and strengthen the body and mind. Any other benefits should be secondary.

Participation in Sport

For an individual Muslim, the safest route would be to engage in an activity which our Beloved Prophet (*Sallallâhu alaihi wasallam*) encouraged in its pure, unadulterated form. Alternatively, any activity can be engaged in, which does not compromise any laws of Shariah and further conforms to those conditions which have been laid down by the learned Ulama.

Watching or Spectating Sport

Although the jurists differ in opinion, watching or spectating modern sport, can at the very least, only be sanctioned under certain conditions. However, based on Islamic principles as well as on the harms of crowd behaviour, intermingling of sexes, etc., we cannot and should not encourage spectating or attending modern sporting events.

Concluding Remarks

It is unlikely that worldwide interest and enthusiasm for sport will decrease in the near future. In fact, the role players of the sporting world are constantly developing and concocting new methods of expanding the horizons of sporting interest.

We, the Muslim Ummah, need to realise the implications of sport on our lives and react accordingly. At present, sporting interest amongst Muslims can be described as excessive. We need to rationalise our behaviour and actions according to Islamic injunctions and ideals if we aim to succeed in this world and the Hereafter.

May Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*) accept this humble effort and may He guide us all to everlasting success.

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Concluding Remarks

It is unlikely that worldwide interest and enthusiasm for sport will decrease in the near future. In fact, the role players of the sporting world are constantly developing and concocting new methods of expanding the horizons of sporting interest.

We, the Muslim Ummah, need to realise the implications of sport on our lives and react accordingly. At present, sporting interest amongst Muslims can be described as excessive. We need to rationalise our behaviour and actions according to Islamic injunctions and ideals if we aim to succeed in this world and the Hereafter.

May Allâh (*'Azza wa jall*) accept this humble effort and may He guide us all to everlasting success.

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